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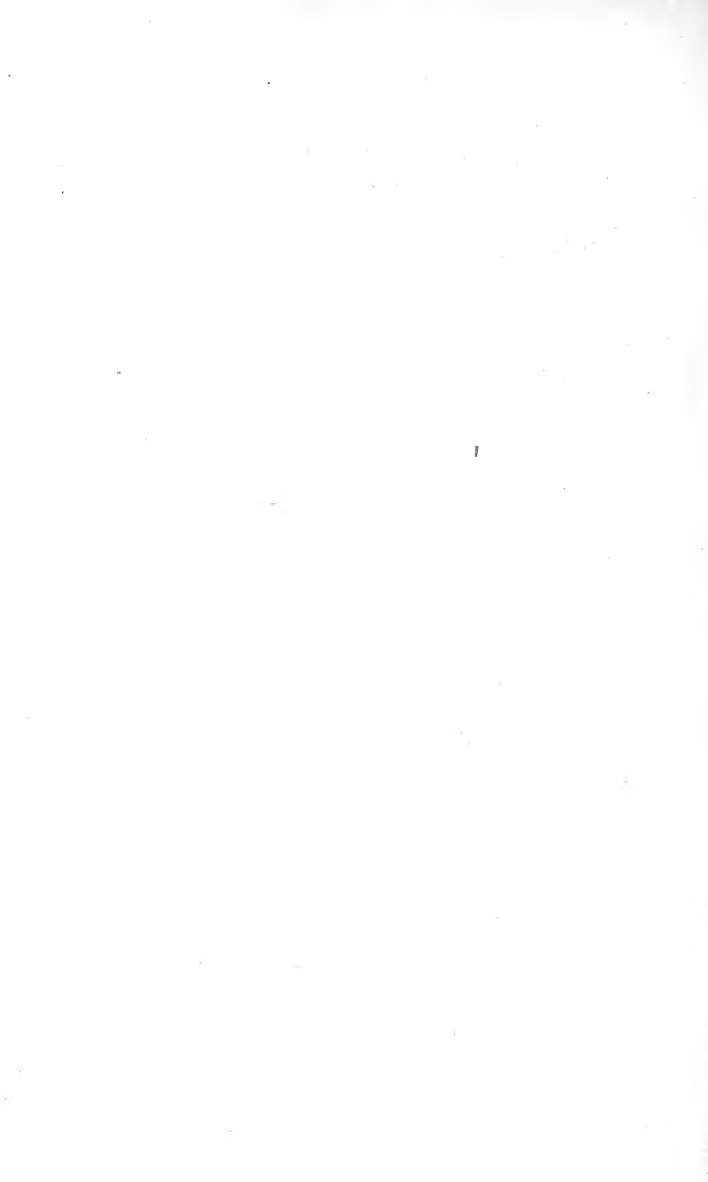
To the Children of

Prof. Spencer F. Baird.

With the regards of

Edward A. Samuels.

Boston Nov. 4, 1867.



AMONG THE BIRDS.



THE TRIAL.

AMONG THE BIRDS:

A SERIES OF SKETCHES FOR
YOUNG FOLKS,

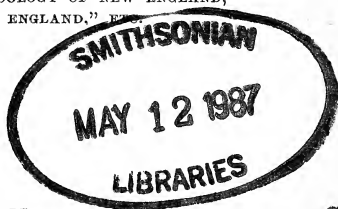
ILLUSTRATING THE

Domestic Life of our Feathered Friends.

BY

EDWARD A. SAMUELS,

AUTHOR OF "ORNITHOLOGY AND OÖLOGY OF NEW ENGLAND,"
"MAMMALOGY OF NEW ENGLAND," ETC.

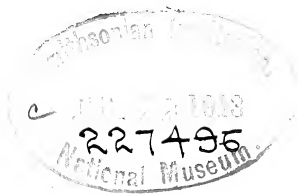


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P R E F A C E.

THE author, in preparing this little volume, has endeavored to weave among the woof of facts regarding our most familiar birds, their habits and peculiarities, a warp of romantic fancy; believing that such will be more attractive than plain and consequently more technical descriptions.

Young folks are always willing to be amused; and, if their amusements can be made instructive, a very desirable end is gained.

While intending the volume more for the perusal of the young, it is hoped that it will possess some little interest to "children of a larger growth;" and if, on glancing over its pages, the public is pleased to receive it with the indulgence with which it has received former productions, the author will be most amply repaid.

Boston, Sept. 2, 1867.

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LIFE AMONG THE BIRDS.

THE BROWN THRUSHES, AND THEIR FIRST YEAR'S MARRIED LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

BBROWN THRUSH, Esq., returned to his summer home in Massachusetts, early in May. He had spent a very pleasant winter in the South, living in the midst of plenty, with many of the neighbors at home that he knew while there ; and as he had had nothing to worry him, or give him trouble, he came back fat, cheerful, and with a gay attire, that showed no signs of wear, but seemed fresh and neat as if just put on. Immediately on his return, he visited the scenes of his childhood, or rather chickhood, and searched for the nest in which he had been reared, but found that the storms of winter had torn it

down and scattered its materials over the ground. Every thing else, however, was as he remembered it, and he soon felt perfectly at home. For a few days he rambled about the neighborhood, without any particular purpose, other than enjoyment. He found an abundance of nice beetles and worms for food, and the clearest and coolest water in a spring near by, for drink, and of course he could not but enjoy himself. But, after a while, he became tired of living by himself, for he had no intimate friends, as nearly all his neighbors had wives, and were making preparations for housekeeping, and when he met them and proposed a little jaunt or excursion, they invariably told him they were busy; and their ladies often looked coldly upon him, for they suspected that he was trying to lead their husbands from them; and they declared that "he ought to marry and settle down;" some of them adding, "such a fine-looking, smart thrush as he." So, after a little while, he began looking about for a mate. The scandal-mongers among the birds in the neighborhood,

DSI

although they watched closely to see whom he selected, were unable to find out who the favored one was to be, for a long time, for he knew that the remarks passed upon his choice would be uncharitable, for busybodies always contrive to find something to pass judgment on and find fault with; so he very discreetly paid his attentions to Miss Brown Thrush, a distant relative, when he met her alone in some secluded spot in the woods, and treated her only with common politeness when he met her in society.

One day, however, the whole secret of his affection's was exposed in the following manner: A newly wedded pair of Cat Birds had prepared their house in the barberry thicket that stood in the grove where Brown made his home. It was his custom, mornings, to give them a hasty call, for they were distant connections of his, and he was on good terms with them: he would wish them a good-morning, inquire about their health, and ask for the news, and then pass on in his rambles.

On the day in question, quite a number of

neighbors had assembled to congratulate Mrs. Cat Bird on her success in laying four beautiful green eggs. Mr. Thrush joined them, and was warm in his congratulations and good wishes; when one of the ladies in the company spoke up quite smartly, saying, "Really, Mr. Thrush, for a bachelor, you are very kind with your congratulations to Mrs. Cat Bird; we supposed that you were a determined woman-hater, and all thoughts of matrimonial encumbrances were extremely disagreeable to you."

"We had no idea you could be so gallant," said another lady; "by and by we shall expect to see you paying your attentions to Miss Brown Thrush. What a fine-looking couple you would make, to be sure!"

"Both of a height and of the same complexion," remarked old Mrs. Yellow Bird.

"Of course, you will send us cards to the wedding," said Mrs. Cat Bird, playfully.

At these railleries, the whole company burst into a roar of laughter, that is, as much of a roar as such discreet and decorous birds per-

mit themselves to indulge in. Brown Thrush, although in ordinary times quick at retort, could not answer these attacks: he blushed visibly, and tried to turn the subject. Miss Thrush, who was of the party, also was visibly embarrassed, which the other females observing, they all turned to her, and the attack was general; for members of the fair sex never show each other mercy, if they have an opportunity to make them uncomfortable.

"Oh, you sly thing!" said old grandmother Towhee Bunting. "Who would have thought you could keep such an affair secret? Why, when my poor dear old Towhe and I were engaged, all the birds in the neighborhood knew it in less than an hour;" and the old lady fairly trembled with her dissatisfaction at Miss Brown's reticence.

"Such secrecy is abominable," shouted old Black Crow, who chanced to be in an oak-tree near, and heard the whole discussion.

"It looks bad: something is wrong at the bottom of it, you may depend," he added, maliciously. "Ah, I'm off. Bah! bah!" he

sneered back as he flew out of sight. Most of the other birds agreed with him, for they knew he never expressed his opinion so forcibly without great cause [*caws*].

Miss Thrush, now having recovered her self-possession, — young females always quickly do under similar circumstances, — waited until the storm was over, when she said quietly, —

“ Really, friends, I don’t know what you all mean. Mr. Brown has been no more than a friend to me, and I have regarded him only as such, for we are friends, *dear* friends: are we not?” she said, addressing Mr. Brown in a playful manner; for it is a characteristic of the sex to plague their admirers at every opportunity.

Poor Brown, not liking her badinage, would have at once fled; but his pride coming to the rescue, he answered her as coolly as possible, “ Yes: dear, *very* dear friends.”

This answer quickly caused Miss Brown to resume her remarks, and she continued, “ We have never talked of love matters, and we are nothing more to each other than we have been in times past.”

This speech from Miss B. was received with murmurs of incredulity by the female portion of the company, for they instinctively saw the double meaning of her words. “Mr. Brown *has been* no more than a friend to me, and I *have* regarded him only as such,” evidently meant that he *now* was something else.

Her saying, that they had “never talked of love matters,” and so forth, might be understood in two ways; for it is not always necessary for both parties to talk in such cases, the male usually doing that part of the work before marriage, and the female reserving it as her privilege *after*; and she generally improves it.

While the party were in the midst of their dispute, a large black snake had crept unperceived through the bushes, and, while Miss Brown was speaking, had slowly ascended the tree in which she was sitting; when her speech was ended, he uttered, close beside her, a loud hiss. Turning around quickly, at the insult as she supposed from one of her companions, she saw beside her the hateful enemy of her race.

Almost fainting with terror, she uttered a shriek, and fled for protection to Brown Thrush, thus contradicting all her assertions concerning her comparative indifference for him. As soon as the other birds saw who the intruder was, all was confusion and dismay. Mrs. Cat Bird, knowing that her beautiful eggs were likely to be destroyed, became almost frantic, and calling for help to her companions, she flew at the snake with beak open, and eyes blazing with rage; alighting on the tree beside him, she darted at his eyes, and, assisted by most of the other birds, succeeded in driving him to the ground, where he was soon killed by a boy, who chanced to be passing by.

Conspicuous in the fight was Brown Thrush, who, having placed Miss Thrush in a secure place, flew at the enemy, and gave him some very sharp blows and severe bites. So well did he behave himself, that Mrs. Cat Bird, in a conversation with her husband afterwards, said that he was, after all, a fine fellow, and deserved every happiness, and she hoped that Miss Brown would make him a good wife,

although she had her fears. "She is such a giddy, *flighty* thing, you know."

As soon as the snake was killed, the party dispersed, uttering thanks for the destruction of their enemy. Brown Thrush and his inamorata, finding that secrecy was no longer possible, went off together side by side. When they reached a quiet spot in the midst of a grove of spruces, they paused, and, showing Miss B. a comfortable mossy knoll for a seat, he addressed her as follows: "My dear Miss Brown, you are now probably convinced that further delay to our union is unnecessary. You have seen the unpleasant effects of keeping our engagement secret, and we can henceforth expect nothing better unless we are united. Let us then proceed at once to the Hermit's, and, with hearts beating with fond affection for each other, repeat the holy marriage vows of our sylvan rites."

Miss Brown at first objected to this sudden proposal; but, as her remonstrances were only faint, she soon, with as much dignity as her loving little heart could command, permitted

herself to be persuaded, and with a quiet happiness, Brown Thrush led her to the Hermit's home.

Almost all of us know the Hermit Thrush, and can recognize him from all his neighbors at a glance. He lives in a delightful little glen in the midst of the forest, his home being surrounded on all sides by gently sloping hills, that are thickly bestrewn with bright, fragrant flowers. There, from early daybreak until late at night, he pours forth beautiful hymns of praise and thanksgiving to his Creator, the zephyrs whispering through the trees, and the rill tinkling through the bottom of the glen, the softest and most appropriate accompaniments.

To him the young couple repaired for the solemnization of their nuptials. After a few customary remarks and courtesies, the Hermit, with a benign expression on his countenance, placed the pair before him, side by side, and commenced the rites of marriage as observed by the birds of this order.

“My friends,” he began, “you propose to



THE WEDDING.

enter into the state which of all others is, perhaps, the sweetest and most natural that birds bear one another. You come with your young hearts beating with fond affection together, with no thought of aught but the happiness and comfort of each other. All of life to you seems bright and joyous, and the world appears as nothing but one vast garden, in which you have but to live and enjoy yourselves.

“But it is my duty to inform you before I consummate this marriage, that matrimony, although often one of the greatest of blessings, is too often made one of the most terrible of curses. Many things are requisite to make its happiness perfect, but few needed to make its sorrows apparent and unbearable.

“Of the former the principal are strong affections, mutual forbearance with each other's failings, kindness and generosity of disposition, and earnest and perfect faith in the strength of, and mutual dependence on, the love of each other.

“To make your wedded lives unhappy, but very few things, as I before remarked, are

needed, and of these, jealousy and want of faith in each other's integrity are most terribly fatal. I trust you have thoroughly examined your hearts, and weighed carefully the responsibilities you are about to incur ; and above all things, I hope you have studied the character and disposition of each other, and, while admiring the more lovable traits apparent, have not been blind to the imperfections which all mortals must in a measure possess."

The young couple made no answer to this address, but the glance they gave each other spoke volumes for the strength of their attachment. The Hermit continued, —

"Brown Thrush, do you take this young female to be your lawfully wedded mate ; to provide for her wants, and defend her from the attacks of the enemies of our race ; do you promise to assist her in the labors of nest-building, and the arduous duties of incubation ; do you promise to provide her and her children with an abundance of insect food, to capture for them the larvæ of butterflies and moths, and gather for her and them the luscious

strawberries and whortleberries that are so acceptable to the palate ; do you promise to watch beside her in the silent hours of the night, when hungry cats and snakes prowl around her, designing to make her their victim ; do you promise to remain faithful to her, and love and cherish her until death shall you part ? ”

“ I do,” answered the young bridegroom firmly.

“ And you, Miss Thrush,” continued the Hermit, addressing her, “ do you take this young male to be your lawfully wedded mate ; do you promise to cherish and obey him ; do you promise to attend faithfully to the duties of your married life ; care for the children given you, educate them in the ways of morality, and teach them to perform the duties that will be incumbent on them in time to come ; and when you have left these northern scenes for your winter home in the far south, will you remain faithful and affectionate to your spouse, through all the gayeties and temptations of that beautiful clime ? ”

“I will,” answered the young bride, in sweet accents.

“Then I here, by the authority conferred upon me by the assembled tribes of the great order Oscines, pronounce you lawfully wedded, and what the Creator has caused to be joined together let no bird put asunder.”

With these words the ceremony was completed, when, after the usual congratulations and good wishes, he kindly dismissed them; and as they slowly left his home, the birds that had quietly assembled to witness the ceremony commenced a hymn, that, although unaccompanied by the organ's harmonious tones, was more beautifully sweet and heart-soothing than any voluntary or wedding march that ever ushered a bride and bridegroom from the portals of their wedding church.

And thus they were married.

CHAPTER II.

THE first week of their married life was passed in a continuous round of pleasure ; Brown gallantly escorting his bride to the shades of the fragrant hemlock groves, where she loved to repose during the heat of mid-day, or wandering with her in some secluded spot in a favorite glen, or attending her in her calls upon her neighbors, with whom she was now on the best of terms. His constant care was for her comfort and happiness, and many were the commendatory remarks made upon his conduct by the female part of the community. The male portion said less, most of them remarking that they acted just the same when they were first married ; “ but they knew how to restrain their ardor, now ; ” and some of them were so malicious as to emphasize *now*. However, Brown tried hard to please his mate, and as she has never uttered any complaints, he doubtless

has succeeded in making her "a model husband."

At the expiration of the first week, the period allotted by birds of any position in society, as a sort of wedding week, corresponding to the honeymoon, or month among humans, it was time to look about for a suitable spot for a house, for the Thrushes are fastidious in their ideas about housekeeping, and seldom will occupy a tenement that they do not themselves build.

Some little time was spent in the selection of a site, for there are many things to be taken into consideration, even in the choice of a nesting-place, and it is not every spot that will do ; but finally, it was decided to build in a grove of young birches, in almost the same locality that Brown was reared in, the preceding season.

The Brown Thrushes are somewhat variable in their choice of a nesting-place, some individuals building their tenements in the fork of a low tree, others putting it in an alder, or juniper bush, whilst most of them prefer to

place it on the ground. Brown, not to appear eccentric, and because his parent nest was in a similar position, determined to build on the ground, and so the bringing of materials and adjusting them into a commodious structure was fairly commenced.

First, there was collected a large number of dead twigs and dry leaves, which were adjusted into a compact pile, and slightly interwoven together; on these were placed finer twigs and pieces of vines, which were twined together pretty strongly; in this form the sides of the nest were carried up and finished, leaving in the middle a hollow of three or four inches in diameter, and about two in depth; this was to be the apartment in which the family of young Thrushes, if they were blessed with such, was to be reared. It was carefully arranged, and lined with fine roots and pieces of soft grape-vine bark, and horse-hairs, which were all intertwined into the sides of the structure with great care and neatness.

Thus was the house built and furnished, for with the soft bed formed of the fine roots

and grape-vine bark, no other furniture was needed to secure the comfort and well-being of the family ; for, if comfort is gained with a little furniture, is it not folly to litter up the house with stacks of gimcracks that are only in the way, and are only procured to gratify our vanity and love of show ?

The work being done, Brown and his wife congratulated each other on their success, and the dear lady was so pleased with it, that she often entered her pleasant room and sat down in it in different positions, to test the degrees of comfort which it afforded.

On the next day after the nest was finished, the first egg was laid, and in three or four days after, three were added to it ; they were all of a beautiful bluish-white color, and were covered with very fine dots or dustings of light brown. As soon as the four eggs were laid, the neighbors assembled to offer their congratulations, and when they were exposed to their view, the opinion was general that Mrs. Brown Thrush was destined to be an ornament to her sex ; after an hour spent in kind wishes

and thoughtful advice, for which the young couple, of course, returned their thanks, the guests departed, when Brown, proud of the good opinion the neighbors had for his wife, insisted that she should not commence the duties of incubation immediately, but that the remainder of the day should be passed in calling on one or two of the neighbors, who had lately been similarly blessed with themselves, and in visiting some of the pleasant places that they frequented in the days of their early marriage.

We will not follow them in their visits; but, while they are away from the nest, we will see whom they had for neighbors, and where and how they lived. We already know that the Cat Birds resided in the barberry thicket close by; their next nearest neighbors were old Mr. and Mrs. Towhee Bunting, who had a nest on the side of a little hill within a few rods' distance. In a cedar-tree near the birch-grove, the Robin family were living, and in a hollow branch of an oak, that shaded the whole neighborhood, an old couple named Chick-a-dee had

a dwelling-place. These were the near neighbors. In a swampy meadow just the other side of the oak-grove, Redwing Blackbird, his wife, and family had a home; and in a hollow trunk of a tree in the thickest part of the forest, an old bachelor named Red Owl lived solitary and alone.

Besides these, within an eighth of a mile, there were the Cedar Birds and Yellow Warblers, and Song Sparrows, and those hateful, piratical things, the Blue Jays. Altogether, the neighborhood was pretty populous, and Brown and his *cara sposa* need not want for society. On the next day the gallant young husband escorted his mate to her nest, when, having seen her comfortably arranged, he took his position in a tree near by, and singing his sweetest songs, he cheered her on in the labors which she had now commenced. After a large part of the day had passed, in which he had taken care that Mrs. B. was supplied with the choicest of delicacies, he took her place on the eggs, and permitted her to go abroad, and take a little exercise; for he was not a selfish

Thrush, and he knew that ladies, although preferring, of course, to attend to their own domestic affairs, are still grateful for a little assistance, and opportunities to obtain relaxation, and such are especially pleasant when coming from a husband. It is no light matter being confined to the house all the livelong day, doing the drudgery that is inseparably connected with housekeeping, and the little attentions which husbands pay their wives, and the assistance which they render, go farther than any thing else towards preserving the affection with which they started on their matrimonial career.

So Mrs. Brown, with a grateful caress, left the nest, and after bathing, and arranging her dress, she paid a flying visit to one or two of her choicest friends, spending a short hour with them; then returning to her home, she resumed her place in the nest, Brown relinquishing his position only after repeated solicitations. After this, for the remainder of the day, he remained in the immediate neighborhood, ready to protect his wife from

the attacks of marauding enemies, and to talk to and enliven her while engaged in her labors. At night he took up his position close to the nest, where he kept a careful guard over his treasures, and only slept when he was certain of the greatest security.

Thus passed the first day of incubation, and the others were but copies of it, Brown exhibiting the same kind attentions and watchful care for the security and comfort of his loving wife, and she showing the same fond affection for her mate, and appreciation of the attentions that he bestowed upon her.

At last four little Thrushes were hatched, and, as soon as the parents could control themselves sufficiently in their great excitement, the neighbors were notified of the happy event, and such a gathering, and such a tempest of congratulations, were never seen or heard in birddom. All the ladies agreed that the little strangers looked the very image of their papa, — that is the very first opinion that we ever hear expressed by the sex, about a baby; — and while some of their husbands

would have preferred a little difference between them, as with their own children, none could deny that they were remarkable specimens of health and vigor; and as for appetites, they certainly could vouch for them, since the moment one of the visitors approached the young ones, they all with one accord opened their mouths and cried for food.

After their visitors had departed, Brown and his wife, nervous with happiness at the kind remarks of their neighbors, went about providing their little ones with food; and although it kept them pretty busy to satisfy their appetites, since nothing but the most delicate food would do for their young stomachs, the labor was a pleasure, so great was their pride and affection for their offspring.



CHAPTER III.

WE will not follow this worthy young couple through their labors in rearing the young Thrushes, for they present no incident of

note, every thing going on smoothly and satisfactorily, the juveniles waxing big and fat, and soon assuming the dress which of right belonged to them ; but we will pass at once to the only disagreeable occurrence that marked the first year's wedded life of the Browns. The event came near being a disastrous one to Brown, who was the innocent victim of a great mistake, and was made to suffer through the malice of a deceitful enemy. It was in this wise : —

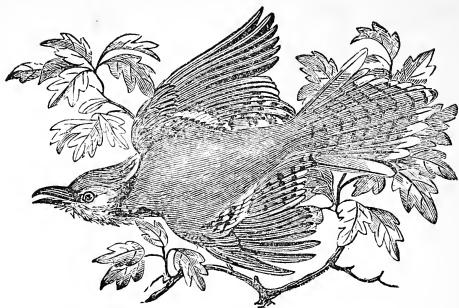
In a severe storm of wind and rain, one of the young Robins fell from its nest in the neighboring cedar, and was found lying on the ground, half dead with cold, by a boy who chanced to be passing that way ; with a generosity highly creditable to him, he looked about for its nest, and finding the home of Brown Thrush, put the little Robin with the four young Thrushes.

Now it happened that Brown and his mate were away for food when this was done, and they knew nothing of the transaction until they returned, when what was their astonish-

ment and dismay, to find that their family had been increased, and by a young one evidently belonging to their neighbors, the Robins. Now it is all very well to take care of your own children and bring them up, but it is not so pleasant to have a child belonging to your neighbor thrust upon you. We know that the first thoughts with humans, in such an event, would be that their neighbors, grown weary with the care and trouble of rearing their young, had improved a favorable opportunity, and turned it over to them; and, as birds and human beings often think alike, such was the conclusion jumped at instantly by both Brown and his indignant wife.

In their anger and contempt, they were about thrusting the little one from their house, when who should at that moment chance along but Blue Jay, a noisy, conceited, mischief-making scamp, and an old enemy of the Thrushes, he once having been caught near their nest, evidently intending to steal their eggs.

With a deceitful smile on his face — all mis-



BLUE JAY.

chief-makers are deceitful — he approached the Thrushes, and, bowing with great humility, said to Brown, —

“Oh! good morning, my dear Thrush, and you, my dear madam. I am glad to see you looking so well after the terrible storm. I heard, only yesterday, that you have been blessed with four young cherubs, and I declare, it did me good; for, although you never seemed to like me, and once even treated me very rudely,” (when Brown caught him near his nest, and gave him a good chastisement,) “I harbored no ill feeling, and I thought that now would be a good opportunity to heal the

breach, and make us good friends and neighbors ;—for children are sent as peace-makers in some families : are they not ? — and I am sure that you cannot, in the possession of four little darlings, treasure up an undying enmity for me.”

While making this long speech, Blue Jay was bowing and smirking in the most obsequious manner. Mr. and Mrs. Brown, feeling of course that it would be impolitic to make him their bitter enemy in their present trouble, answered him as politely as they could. They said they had no hard feelings against him, and were glad that an opportunity had arrived in which past difficulties could be healed ; and they were glad that he called, for they were in trouble, and his advice might help them out of it. It is not best to confide one's troubles to a person we have ever in any way injured, particularly when we have any doubts of the character he has, or the feelings which he may entertain for us. They then told him about the interloper in their nest, and gave him their opinion that the Robins had thrust their

offspring upon them, as they could account for its being in their nest in no other manner.

Now, Blue Jay knew very well how the young Robin had got there, as he was a witness to the whole transaction ; but he hated the Thrushes, and his visit now was only prompted by his desire to be revenged upon them. He, however, pretended to be lost in wonder and indignation at its abandonment by its parents, and expressed the opinion that such conduct was below contempt.

“ But what shall we do with it ? ” nervously inquired Brown. “ I cannot in conscience see the little thing starve.”

“ And we will die before we will ask those wretches to take it back,” added Mrs. B., excitedly.

“ No ! you cannot ask them to take it back without debasing yourselves,” said Blue Jay. “ But I will tell you what can be done : I can act as mediator, and will make an effort to bring the Robins to their natural feelings.”

“ Will you do this ? ” eagerly asked Mrs. Brown. “ Oh ! my dear sir, how could we do

you such injustice in times past? how can you ever forgive us for our unkindness?" And the dear creature was almost affected to tears. Brown was also visibly touched, but he said nothing.

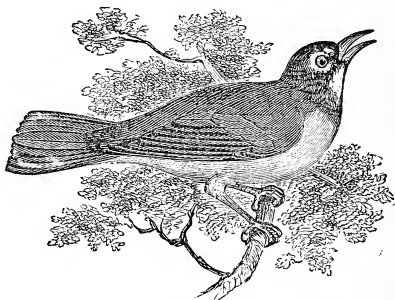
"Do not say one word," answered Blue Jay. "I knew you would at some time or other see that I am not your enemy; and I am, to tell the truth, not sorry that this thing has occurred, for you can now appreciate my friendship for you" (and with a vengeance, he added to himself). "But I will go at once on my mission," he continued; "and I hope before long that every thing will be adjusted to the satisfaction of all parties."

At these words, he hurried off in the direction of the Robins, leaving the Thrushes overwhelmed with gratitude at his kindness, and shame for their ill-treatment of him.

At the Robins' he found confusion and dismay. "Their young had disappeared mysteriously — nothing was known of its whereabouts — who could have done it? they didn't know they had an enemy in the world" —

such were the complaints poured into the ears of Blue Jay. Poor Mrs. Robin was in a fever of excitement ; for, if one of her children was stolen, who could say when the others would be taken ? “ Oh, dear, Blue Jay, what shall we do ? ” The poor creature was fairly wild with terror.

Jay, who had had until now no chance to get in a word, took advantage of this paroxysm to say in a quiet, sympathetic tone, “ Mrs. Robin, control yourself, and I think I can throw a little light on this matter, although



MR. ROBIN.

it is with the greatest sorrow and pain that I am obliged to say any thing to make trouble and ill-will between near neighbors and friends.

The fact is, your child has been stolen, and is now in the house of one who has had no reason to treat you in this cruel manner."

"Whom do you mean?" quickly asked Robin; "speak out, for pity's sake; surely none of our friends are base enough to rob us of, and persist in depriving us of, our young."

"Yes, my friend," answered Blue Jay: "horrible as it may seem, such is the fact. I reasoned with them, and tried to dissuade them to the best of my power, but in vain; they persist in keeping your child, and you have but one remedy left, and that is the law. You must have them indicted for kidnapping, and I will give sufficient evidence to ensure their punishment, and restore your child to you."

"We must do as you say," replied Robin, after a few moments' reflection; "but who is it that is so cruel as to do this thing?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Robin, warmly, "who are the robbers, the wicked wretches?"

"The guilty ones are the Brown Thrushes," answered Blue Jay, meekly.

“What! the Brown Thrushes?” exclaimed both the Robins in astonishment. “What could have prompted them to do it?” — “Why, they have four children of their own,” continued Mrs. R., “and surely we have always treated them like brother and sister. I never was more astonished in my life.”

“We cannot always account for the wickedness of people,” said Blue Jay, hypocritically; “but I have no doubt but that the great beauty of your child had excited the jealousy of the Browns, and they determined to possess themselves of it, and trust to luck in not getting caught. If I had not witnessed the robbery, who knows what story they would have trumped up, or vile deed perpetrated, even to placing one of their own brats in your house in exchange for the one they stole.”

“What!” exclaimed Robin, “did you witness the diabolical deed?”

“I did,” answered Blue Jay. “It was during the recent storm. I was abroad in search of food, when, as I chanced to be in this neighborhood, I noticed Brown lurking about

in a suspicious manner. I thought I would watch him, and I soon saw him in your absence seize the young one, and bear it off to his nest. Thinking that I might be able to persuade him to return it without being obliged to expose his rascality, I lately visited him; when what was my astonishment, to hear both him and his wife absolutely deny the whole proceeding! Such audacity completely overcame me; and I had to leave to recover my wits, and consult with you as to what course you intend to take."

"Oh, the wretches!" burst forth Mrs. Robin, now fairly overcome with indignation; "they shall suffer for this. Robin, go at once to Judge Red Owl, and sue out a writ against the Browns for kidnapping; we will see if we are to be robbed in this manner with impunity."

"Stop one moment," interrupted Blue Jay, "let us not be hasty. I will go to them again, and make one more effort to see if we cannot prevent this scandalous thing from being made public. I will picture to them your agony at

discovering your loss, and describe your awful fears that the young one is dead. I will not, at first, inform them of your knowledge that they have it, and they will perhaps be more likely to return it. Do you not think that best ? ”

“ Perhaps it is,” replied Robin, “ but I am afraid they will not listen to reason now.”

“ Possibly not, but it will do no harm to try ; so I’ll off at once, and soon return with the success of my errand ; ” and at these words he flew to the Thrushes, laughing to himself at the folly of people employing a third party as mediator in a difficulty that they can best adjust themselves.

Brown and his mate were anxiously awaiting the return of the self-constituted mediator, hoping that he would meet with good success ; but his serious countenance, as he alighted near them, showed that his errand had been fruitless.

“ Well ! what do they say ? ” inquired Brown, impatiently.

“ Oh ! they refuse decidedly to have any

thing more to do with their child; they say you are younger and better able to rear it than they, and they consider that you have had enough favors and advice from them to more than pay you for bringing it up."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. B. T., fairly gasping with astonishment, "what do the wretches mean? they never did us a favor, and as for advice; all they ever gave us was so silly that we never thought to follow it; favors and advice, indeed!" and Mrs. Brown fairly bristled with anger.

"Brown," she continued, addressing her husband, "you must at once complain of those Robins as vagrant birds, sue them for trespass, and have them indicted for abandonment of their children; we will see if we are to be imposed upon in this outrageous manner."

Brown did not answer her immediately; but, after a few moments of reflection, he said to his mate, "No, dear, we will not be hasty. I cannot believe that the Robins are so unnatural as to persist in this abandonment. We will feed and care for the little one for

a few days, and not have the neighbors know of the matter at all; for, when the Robins come to their senses, we shall feel much better, and they will have a greater regard for us, to know that their unnatural conduct has been kept secret. And you, Blue Jay, will confer a very great favor on us, if you will say nothing about it to any one. Please return to the Robins, and tell them that we are sorry to see such conduct in them, but that we have sufficient charity to care for the little abandoned thing until its parents come to their senses. Be kind in your tone, for a harsh word only enkindleth wrath: is it not best to act in this way?" he added, turning to his mate. Mrs. Brown, like a good wife, acknowledged that her husband's plan was a good one, although her feminine heart was still a little sore at the manner in which they had been imposed on.

Blue Jay, vastly pleased at his success in keeping the parties separate, and consequently furthering his schemes, wished the Browns good day, and good luck with their *protégé*,

and returned to the Robins, to whom he reported that he had tried every argument with the Brown Thrushes, had appealed to all their best feelings, if they had any, which he very much doubted, and concluded by saying, that they had now no resource but the law. Robin at this repaired to the residence of Judge Red



JUDGE RED OWL.

Owl, and made a formal complaint against Brown Thrush and his wife "for maliciously stealing, kidnapping, and purloining the child of said complainant, and keeping, holding, and

confining said child against the wishes, consent, and pleasure of said complainant.

Accordingly, on this complaint the judge issued a writ summoning "Brown Thrush and his wife to appear with the body of said child of said complainant, before the court, of which he was Judge, on the 28th day instant, at four of the clock, past meridian, and show just cause why they keep, hold, and confine said child against the wishes, consent, and pleasure of said complainant, and to receive the judgment of the court, if in its opinion they are guilty of the crimes of stealing, kidnapping, and purloining, as charged against them, the defendants' in the complaint, of which the above is a true copy.

"Attest,

CEDAR BIRD,

"Clerk of Criminal Court."

Of course, in human law matters, Brown Thrush and his wife would have been arrested on a writ, and confined in jail until the time of trial, unless they could get a stated amount of bonds, or bail, as the term is ; but with birds it is only necessary to serve on the defendant

a copy of the complaint and summons, for they have no prisons, bail, or bondsmen, but it is a matter of honor with them to appear before the tribunal at the time designated, and there is no case on record where such a summons has been neglected.

Brown and his wife were busily engaged feeding their own and the Robins' young, when the complaint and summons were served on them; to describe their astonishment is impossible, but it soon gave place to indignation and contempt for the rascally trick which they now saw had been played upon them by Blue Jay. At first they thought to go at once to the Robins and tell the whole story, but they soon perceived that it would do no good, for they would not be believed, for their action would only show that they were afraid of the law; so they had no choice but to stand their trial, and, with a sublime faith in the triumph of the right, they assured the judge's messenger that they would be ready to defend their case, adding that they had no doubt but that every thing would be cleared up satisfactorily.

After the messenger had departed, Mrs. B. asked of her husband, "What is to be done with young Robin in the mean time?"

"That's true," answered Brown: "as in many other legal documents, there is a very important point overlooked, for there is nothing said in the summons about that; we are only required to produce the body at the trial."

"Yes," replied his mate, "but we cannot see the little thing starve, for it would in ten days; and I don't see but that we shall have to feed and rear it; and in so doing, if we do not heap coals of fire on the heads of the Robins, I am mistaken."

"Yes," said Brown, "and if I catch that Blue Jay, I will heap something more than coals of fire on *his* head; but we must to work. Such an addition to our family will add considerably to our labors, and we shall have no time to spare."

"But what will the neighbors say," inquired Mrs. B., "while we are awaiting the trial?"

"That's a question I cannot answer. Blue Jay will, no doubt, circulate all the lies he can

think of. We must trust to the good sense of our friends; and if they believe our enemy, why, we have the consciousness of our own innocence to comfort ourselves with."

So the Brown Thrushes went to work, and before the time of the trial, they had finished the rearing of their own young and the Robin. And if they had not been required to produce the latter at court, they would have turned the whole five adrift, to provide for themselves.

Blue Jay, during this time, had been busy in mischief-making. But most of the neighbors, knowing his character, paid little attention to his stories, but waited the trial for developments that would, in all probability, establish the innocence of the accused.

Some uncharitable ones, of course, turned the cold shoulder to them, but they were few, and of rather questionable character themselves, such as the Cherry Birds and Cow Buntings.

CHAPTER IV.

THE time for the trial at length arrived. The Robins had retained for their counsel Maryland Yellow Throat, a shrewd, quick-witted fellow, while the Thrushes depended upon a cousin of theirs, by the name of Wilson's Thrush, a quiet, unostentatious, but thoroughly informed bird, and capable of conducting almost any case that might arise in the courts in which he was permitted to practise. The place appointed for the sitting was near the residence of Red Owl, in a grove of white oaks, whose wide-spreading branches and thick foliage threw the scene into that semi-obscurity that is so necessary to maintain the dignity and importance of the tribunal on whose judgment so much of happiness and sorrow depends.

The jury, consisting of twelve of the neighboring birds, being duly empanelled, the judge announced that the court was prepared to hear

all cases ready for trial. That of the Robins *versus* the Brown Thrushes being the only one on the docket, it was immediately commenced. We will not follow the reading of the indictment, nor the testimony giving by the opposing parties. The prosecution brought forward but one important witness, Blue Jay, whose testimony was similar to the story he told the Robins, when their young one was first stolen. The Browns related the story of the transaction as they knew it, and their counsel, by a skilful cross-questioning, showed Blue Jay up in no enviable character. Circumstantial evidence was brought forward by both parties, but of no importance in affecting the fact of the kidnapping. After all the evidence was taken, the court prepared to hear the pleas of the opposing counsel.

The attorney for the prosecution was the first to begin.

“Your Honor and Birds of the Jury,” he commenced, “the case which is now occupying our attention is of such importance to the whole community, and involves such immense

questions, that it is with no little diffidence that I commence my plea, opposed as I am by the most able talent that our bar contains." Here he bowed politely to the counsel for the Browns. " But I am strengthened in my cause by the consciousness that I am laboring for the right, that my efforts are directed against the most abominable and outrageous plot that was ever known, against the happiness and comfort of one of the most worthy and respectable families of our neighborhood.

" I will not occupy your time with an extended and elaborate argument on the merits of this question, for it is unnecessary ; you are all birds of discretion, and already know and appreciate the bearing of the facts, as they have been exposed to you. I will but review the most important points, and leave the matter to your honest convictions, confident that you will render a verdict of ' guilty ' against these infamous disturbers of our peace and happiness.

" The plaintiffs in this case are well known to all of you, Birds of the Jury ; they are of the

most eminent respectability, and their domestic virtues have endeared them to all the community to a degree unsurpassed by any other birds. Early in the past spring, they took up their abode in this grove, even before some of us had left our southern homes ; and in the interchange of the most affectionate caresses with each other, and friendly greetings with their neighbors, they passed the time away. Soon the period arrived for the preparation of their nest, and you all witnessed the assiduity, the eager industry, with which both these worthy birds labored in its preparation. When it was completed, and the eggs laid, none could excel Mr. Robin in the care and affection with which he attended his mate. Soon a beautiful and interesting group of chicks was ushered into existence, and all of us know how tenderly they were provided for ; their parents, worthy couple, labored incessantly through the livelong day, procuring for them the nicest and most delicate of food ; often endangering their lives to procure some morsel that they knew would be especially grateful to the appe-

tites of their young ; thus the days flew by, and all was happiness and peace.

“ But soon, a cloud came across this beautiful scene. A pair of birds, neighbors with children of their own, becoming jealous of the beauty of the young Robins, and instigated by we know not what other base motive, determined to steal one of these dear young ones, and keep it from its parents. You have seen by the evidence of a very reliable witness, Mr. Blue Jay, how the vile deed was accomplished, and learn from the conversation that he gives, as having passed between himself and the defendants, that they were determined from the first to persist in their wicked act. The defence that they set up is so absurd that it cannot, for an instant, be listened to by any sensible birds ; for if they, the defendants, did not know how young Robin got into their nest, why did they not at once proceed to the parent’s home and learn from them the truth ?

“ No ! Birds of the Jury, they were determined to keep the young one, as much to spite the parents, as to gratify their own base

designs ; for when Blue Jay, in the most eloquent language, depicted to these wretches the sorrow and pain that their act had inflicted upon their neighbors, they listened to him, as he testifies, with heartless coldness, and fiercely thrust him from their presence with insults, even blows.

“Birds of the Jury, I will not attempt to describe the terrible effects of this blow upon the plaintiffs. You have all witnessed them, — have seen the settled melancholy which is upon them. They are now before you. Notice the wild and haggard look that their countenances have adopted. Many of us have seen the reckless manner in which they have exposed their lives, when visiting the gardens and orchards of the farmers ; and even courted the death that is almost inevitably found there ; their recklessness was but a sort of insanity, brought on by this most tremendous wrong.

“Birds of the Jury, it is reserved for you not only to restore the affection of the young Robin to its sorrow-stricken parents, but also

pronounce against the wretched culprits a verdict that will be sufficiently severe to, in a measure, repay the plaintiffs for the pain they have suffered, and make this an example for all other birds to take warning from, all time to come.

“I will not occupy your time further, for, as we have so fully proved all our points, a lengthened discussion is superfluous ; we therefore submit our case to your judgment, and ask that you give for us such a verdict as you would individually have rendered for you in a case of similar aggravation and wickedness.”

Maryland Yellow Throat then retired, and as he passed his clients, the look he gave them was the most confident and re-assuring possible. The spectators of the trial threw glances of pity and sympathy towards the Robins, and many of them, convinced of the Thrushes' guilt, regarded them coldly and even with disgust.

It was now time for Wilson's Thrush, Brown's attorney, to make his plea. He began

slowly, and with the dignity that was characteristic with him in all his actions.

"Your Honor, and Birds of the Jury," he began, "the lengthening shadows and evening lowing of the distant cows admonish me of the approach of night, and caution me against extending my argument to an unnecessary length. I will, therefore, be as brief as possible, considering the magnitude of the interests that depend upon this case.

"The difficulty which my clients labor under in this suit, in being opposed by direct testimony, assisted by strong circumstantial evidence, and in being able to offer nothing in reply but a plain narration of the truth, is so great that, if we did not have the firmest faith in the good sense and honest judgment of your honorable body, we should hardly attempt to defend this case, but throw ourselves at once upon the clemency of the court.

"But we believe that when we have thoroughly analyzed the evidence against us, we shall be able to convince your honorable body that we, instead of being the guilty parties in

this transaction, are not only innocent, but are really the sufferers in one of the most atrocious conspiracies ever heard of.

“We will not attempt to create in your minds a favorable feeling for our clients by describing to you the beautiful and admirable domestic virtues with which their former lives were surrounded ; we leave such artful and transparent efforts for the opposing counsel ; we do not wish to make capital out of what we regard as simply our duty. We will give our attention to the facts of this alleged kidnapping, and the evidence that has been brought against us.

“The facts in the case are simply these : the defendants, an honest, upright young couple, against whom there never had been a breath of calumny known, with an interesting young family of four beautiful Thrushes, are living in peace with all their neighbors and acquaintances. Their young ones being blessed with good appetites, they are kept busily employed through the day in procuring for them sufficient food. You all know how

industriously they labored, how little time they had to attend to any thing but their family. Apparently it would be very difficult to feed another mouth, and we cannot but see that such an addition to their family would be undesirable, to say the very least, as it would involve greatly increased cares and labors, and would give these worthy birds still less time to attend to their own wants, and to the requirements of society; for no matter how busy one is with domestic matters, it never does to entirely neglect one's neighbors.

“One day, while both the defendants were away from their nest, honestly employed, by some *hocus pocus* or other the young Robin was introduced into their home; thrust upon them for protection and support. How did this interloper get there, and why was it placed there? To ascertain these points it is necessary for us to examine very carefully what transpired at this time.

“The defendants had but just discovered the presence of the young stranger, and were wondering why it was there, when strangely

enough, considering the relations that had existed between him and the defendants, along happens Mr. Blue Jay. Now, Birds of the Jury, it is not necessary to advert here to the general character of that bird ; you all know what it is. Why the counsel for the plaintiffs calls him a *reliable* bird I cannot imagine, for we all of us know that he is considered as being the greatest *scallawag* in the whole forest. I hope the honorable jury will excuse my using this word, it is quite common among the haymakers over yonder, and I picked it up accidentally ; for our present purpose it answers very well, however, for the witness is in every sense a *scallawag*.

“As I before remarked, that this *reliable* bird should happen along at this particular time is a little strange, for he had not been near the Thrushes for a great while before, he having been smartly thrashed by the defendants at the last visit that he made, having been caught sneaking around, apparently trying to steal their eggs. Observe, Birds of the Jury, he had been thrashed by the defendants, against whom he is the principal witness.

“Now what does this immaculate witness say transpired at this meeting? Why, that the Thrushes declared that the young one was theirs, and persisted in saying so, even when he expressed his surprise at their having five young ones instead of four, the number that he had heard they had originally hatched. After beating about the bush, and trying to catch them in some trap or other, in which he does not seem to have succeeded, he boldly told them, at last, that he had seen them steal it from the parent nest. The answer that they made to this accusation does not appear from his evidence, and we are to judge that they were so dumbfounded that they could make no reply, but gazed on him with mouth agape and feathers fluttering with dismay.

“Now what do the defendants say to all this? Simply, that, as they were debating as to how the young one got into their house, and what they should do with it, Blue Jay came along, and after sympathizing with them at their being imposed upon by the old Robins, as they supposed they had been, and he took

good care to make them continue to think, he offered to go to the parents of the intruder, and reason with them into taking it back. Now, Birds of the Jury, cannot you see the gradual elaboration of this plot? can you not begin to see who the real kidnapper was? does it not begin to look as if the young bird had been placed in the Thrushes' nest by Jay, in order that he might, in the quarrel that was likely to arise, be revenged on the birds that had chastised him? It certainly does. Then, when he went to the Robins, and found them sorrow-stricken and dismayed, as we learn both from his own testimony and theirs, he told them their young one was stolen by the defendants, and they refused to give it up.— After that, when the afflicted parents urged him to return to the despoilers and endeavor to prevail upon them to return their child, he went to them, and, according to their testimony, which is worthy of some attention, he informed them that the old Robins had grown tired of their young one and refused to have any thing more to do with it; does not the

abominable plot become still more plain? Why, Birds of the Jury, it seems to me that nothing more is needed to show that Blue Jay is the real culprit; that the contradictory stories he told the opposing parties, which appear from their own evidence, point him out as the kidnapper and robber; and if that bird were this moment upon his trial, justice would be better satisfied than she now is by the arraignment of these two honest and persecuted birds."

Here he threw a glance of killing contempt at Blue Jay. Many of the spectators rustled their wings in doubt, and some actually began to commiserate the Thrushes in their affliction.

Young Robin was perched on a low limb during the trial, carelessly adjusting his feathers, and when his parents occasionally tried to draw him into conversation, he coldly repulsed them and turned to the Browns, saying that they were the parents that had treated him best, and he would not abandon them.

Wilson's Thrush continued, "Now, Birds

of the Jury, what did the defendants when they found they were accused of kidnapping by the birds that they supposed had abandoned their child, and thrust him upon them? Did they then turn him out into the cold world? No! Did they refuse to support and feed him, as they clearly could? No! with a spirit of generosity and kindly love, far, far above the comprehension of the plaintiffs, they fed him, cared for him, and reared him as tenderly as their own. Even when many of the neighbors looked coldly upon them and apparently blamed them, not one word of complaint passed their bills; but with a firm faith in the triumph of the right, with a heavenly conviction that the innocent would not be permitted to suffer, and the guilty be allowed to go free, they moved on in their accustomed paths, laboring in their work of love and charity, with a strength and devotion that challenge our admiration and respect.

“Birds of the Jury, we ask only that justice be done us, and that, although strong circumstantial evidence is undoubtedly against us,

you analyze this evidence, and endeavor to account for the facts of this kidnapping consistently with reason and truth."

At the close of this plea there was a marked improvement among the spectators in the feeling for the Brown Thrushes.

"There must be something more at the bottom of it than we know of," said Mrs. Yellow Warbler to old Mrs. Chick-a-dee.

"Sure enough," answered that respectable female. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if that rascally Blue Jay knew all about it."

"I always disliked him," remarked Cat Bird, "and I haven't any doubt but that the whole thing is a plot against the Browns."

Such were the remarks made, and as they were accompanied by kindly glances at the Thrushes, they began to feel more comfortable, and to think that selfishness and unkindliness was not the rule with all their neighbors.

CHAPTER V.

JUDGE RED OWL at length ordered silence in the court, that he might charge the jury. Just as he arose, and before he began to speak, a rustling was heard in the leaves, and a Night Hawk that had, unobserved, been listening to the trial, perched on a large, dead branch of a tree, flew down and stood before the court.

“Your Honor,” he said, “I hope you will delay this trial a few moments until I can give my evidence. I think I can throw sufficient light upon the affair of the kidnapping to change somewhat the language of your charge to the jury.”

“If you have any evidence to offer, why did you not give it when the other witnesses were examined?” asked the judge. “It is unusual to take testimony after a case is given to a jury.”

“Because, your Honor,” answered Night Hawk, “I disliked to appear in court, and I

should not have thought of coming now, if I did not feel it my duty to save the innocent who would suffer if I remained silent. I witnessed the whole affair, and would like to testify to what I saw."

Blue Jay, who had begun to grow nervous at the first appearance of this new witness, at these words began to move off, and if the Owl had not seen him as he was at the point of flying away, he would have soon been out of sight. Ordering him to remain until the case was finished, he signified his willingness, although it established a bad precedent, to have the testimony of Night Hawk taken. "Your Honor knows," began the Night Hawk, "that it is my custom on dark and stormy days to be abroad, flying rapidly in different directions in search of food; experience has told me that the moths and other night-flying insects are more active at such times, and, as they are quiet, and consequently difficult to be found after a storm, it is of course necessary to hunt them before it begins. Your honor will probably remember that on the day

when the kidnapping, as it is called, was done, the weather was very dark and lowering long before the storm commenced ; anticipating a tempest, I was abroad early in the day, and, when the rain began to fall I had secured sufficient food for my family and myself to last until fair weather came again. As I was flying home, my mouth filled with insects, just as I passed the home of the Robins, there came a furious blast which nearly forced me into the trees ; as I was recovering myself I chanced to look in the direction of the Robins, when I saw the young one fall to the ground from the tipped-up nest. If I had not been loaded as I was, I should have stopped and given the little one some assistance, but, supposing that it would soon be found by its parents, I flew on to my own family. Just then it began to rain, and feeling that harm might come to it, as soon as I could, I returned ; when, just as I arrived in sight of the nest, who should come along but Farmer Wilkins' son, who, seeing the young Robin on the wet ground, picked it up, and, supposing that it belonged in the Thrushes'

nest near by, he put it in there. Seeing that the young bird was in good keeping, I hurried back to my own family, and it was not until now that I knew that there was any trouble about the matter, much less that such a worthy and honest couple as the Thrushes were accused of stealing the young one. This is all that I know about it; but I think that your Honor will say that Blue Jay, who has given such false evidence here, evidence that he knew to be false, for he saw the boy put young Robin in the nest, as well as myself, is deserving of all the punishment that would have been pronounced on the accused."

To describe the effect of this testimony on the court and spectators is impossible. Crowding around the Thrushes, many of the birds offered their congratulations; and, as is generally the case when such affairs take similar unexpected turns, some of the warmest in their declaration of their having believed all along that the accused were innocent, were some who had turned the coldest shoulders, and had been the first to express a conviction of their guilt.

To their credit be it said, the Robins were among the first to approach the Browns, and while they congratulated them on the full establishment of their innocence, they knew not how to apologize for the pain they had caused them to suffer through their mistake, and the rascality of Blue Jay.

“Do not say a word about it,” quickly said Mrs. Thrush. “We were to blame ourselves for our pride and want of charity ; for if, when we found your child in our nest, we had at once gone to you and inquired about it, all this trouble would have been saved ; but we foolishly supposed that you had abandoned young Robin ; and in our anger at the imposition we believed had been put upon us, we would not listen to the promptings of our better natures, but allowed the counsels of the wicked to prevail with us. No ! we deserved to suffer for our unneighborly treatment of you, and the lesson that we have learned will not be thrown away upon us.”

“And we,” answered Robin, “have learned a lesson, too, that will never be forgotten ; and

that is, never permit an officious third party to interfere in the misunderstandings of two neighbors ; but always let them endeavor to settle them between themselves."

"But what is to become of me?" asked young Robin, the cause of all this controversy ; "whose child am I to be now?"

"Child, indeed," quickly answered Mrs. Robin ; "a pretty fellow you are, fully grown and fledged, and as big as we, thanks to the kind care of our neighbors, the Browns : you must look out for yourself now. Of course we shall like to see you, and you must give us a call, now and then ; but, really, my dear boy, you are a child no longer ; and it is time for you to assume the responsibilities of grown birds."

"Yes," added Mr. Brown, "you are large enough to take care of yourself ; and we hope to see you before long with a family of your own ; and if we can assist you with our advice or otherwise, we shall be glad to ; in the mean time you must be neighborly, and we hope you will visit us as often, and regard us as friendly,

as you do your real parents ; as for us, we think we have had care enough with children this year ; and we mean to enjoy some of the comforts that a bountiful nature has scattered so generously about us.”

At this point the judge, who had, until now, permitted the audience to have full license in their congratulations with the Thrushes, ordered silence in the court, and soon all were quiet and expectant. Red Owl then addressed the jury, in the following language : —

“ Birds of the Jury : the evidence of Night Hawk, which is unquestionable, has so completely established the innocence of the defendants in this suit that I think it is not necessary for me to make a formal charge, but you will return a verdict such as the facts of the case demand. I presume you have determined already in your own minds as to how you will decide ; if so, Birds of the Jury, I recommend that you at once signify your convictions.”

“ Your Honor,” said the foreman of the jury, “ we have consulted among ourselves,

and unanimously pronounce the defendants Not Guilty."

"In accordance, then, with the verdict of the jury," said the judge, addressing the Thrushes, "I release you from custody, free from all suspicion or taint of guilt. I will not dwell upon the peculiarities of this case, nor comment upon the trials and sorrows that you have lately gone through; the sweet consciousness that your innocence has been proved beyond a doubt to all your neighbors, will alleviate in part the effects of those trials and sorrows; but it is our duty, not only to you, but to ourselves, to our whole community, that we inflict upon the wicked Jay the punishment that his crimes demand. I propose, therefore, friends and neighbors, that we pronounce against him some sentence proportionate to the enormity of his crimes, and as you, Brown Thrushes, are the sufferers by his present wickedness, we name you as his judges. What shall be done to him to punish him for his misdeeds?"

"Your Honor," said Brown, after a moment's consultation with his mate, "we do not

like to take so great a responsibility as you require of us. My wife, even, in the excellence of her heart, wishes the culprit to go free, while I, although convinced of the necessity of an example, hardly like to name his punishment. I would suggest, however, if some sentence be pronounced against him, that he be punished by a complete banishment from the society of all birds ; that none but his own kind ever hereafter associate with him. It seems to me that such would be the most proper punishment for one who has proved himself unfit to mingle with society, and a recreant to all the best principles that we are taught to admire and respect."

"That is the very punishment that I should have selected," said the Owl, "and we will now and henceforth pronounce the sentence of proscription against Blue Jay. Let no birds but his own family associate with him, and if he thrust himself upon the society of any others, let them drive him off with contumely and disgrace."

"Away with him!" shouted the crowd, and

with fierce pecks, and blows, and bitter sarcasms, they fell upon him, and drove him away into the solitudes of the forest, and from that day no birds have ever associated with Blue Jay or any of his family.

The court now adjourned, and the spectators scattered in different directions. As it was near dark, those who had young ones hurried about collecting food for their evening meal; those whose families were grown up moved slowly away as their fancies led them.

Brown and his wife, accompanied by their young ones, now fully grown, and the young Robin, repaired to the thicket in which the nest was built. There they assembled in a little group, when Brown addressed them, saying: "My children, the events of to-day have been of such importance that I am certain you will never forget them. I have always endeavored to inculcate in your minds the correct principles by which all birds should be governed; you have seen how they have been illustrated, and in the fate of Blue

Jay you have had a lesson that will sink deep into your hearts. Shun all deceit and hypocrisy. If your neighbor injure you, forgive him; and, instead of trying to get revenge, do him a kindness; in that way you will feel sweeter satisfaction than all the pain you could inflict on him would render. You have been taught every thing necessary to enable you to provide for yourselves; have learned the proper modes of flight, and the theory of the seasons; and you must now care for yourselves. If you observe and follow the lessons we have taught you, happiness and peace will follow your every flight. We will now bid you adieu, for we are about to leave this neighborhood, and shall not probably return to it until next spring. We hope to see you all then, if not before, well and happy, and useful members of society.”

The young birds, knowing that the time for separation from their parents had in the course of nature arrived, listened to his words with attention and quiet respect. Although they were sorry to be obliged to leave them,

they were not so unreasonable as to complain ; and as the twilight shadows grew deeper, and the evening breezes fanned the twinkling stars into brightly glowing points in the heavens, they, with many affectionate carresses and fond farewells, wished them a pleasant journey, promising soon to follow them to their winter homes.

Brown and his wife, ascending into the air, flew around the woods in which they had passed so many happy days. As they were about to take a final leave, they suddenly came across their friend Night Hawk. Thanking him warmly for his kind interference in their behalf, they told him that they had seen so much trouble lately in the neighborhood, that it was hardly pleasant to them, and they were about to leave it for the south. They would ever remember him with the warmest affection, said Mrs. B., "and if he should chance to be near them in the south, he must be sure to call on them ; in the mean time he must take good care of himself, and would he

be so kind as to make their adieux to all their friends ? ”

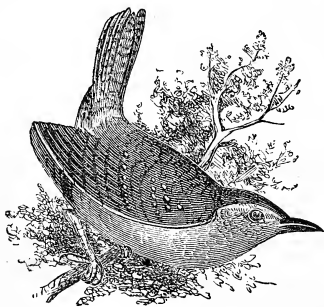
He promised to do so, and when they finally commenced their southern flight, he accompanied them a considerable distance, and only bade them farewell when the darkness of midnight admonished him that he must return to his own home.

And we will leave them, too, kind reader, as their lives, until the next spring, present nothing of interest to us ; their wanderings in the sunny south being nothing but a succession of pleasures and revellings in the luxuries which there abound, without any of the cares and troubles that are necessary to make the existence of all of us perfect. Their children followed them after a few weeks, and some of them returned in the spring after to the same grove where the incidents transpired that we have described. There they mated, and reared their own offspring, without, however, the affliction that their parents experienced. Brown and his wife are coming back to Mas-

sachusetts next spring, and we advise all our young folks to be on the look-out for them, and give them a warm welcome ; they will be found somewhere in the old pasture, most likely in the little grove of birches and alders near the brook, probably in May.

A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF MR. AND MRS. WREN.

MOST of our young folks, without doubt, in their walks in the country, or while they have been employed in the garden, if they happily have one through the summer, have noticed a little brown bird with bright black eyes, beautifully spotted feathers, and a short tail, which it always flirts straight up,



Mrs. Wren.

darting through the vines and shrubbery, and in and out through stone walls and piles of rocks, uttering sometimes a shrill, scolding

chatter, often a lively, cheerful, whistling song, occasionally a faint, inquiring, cricket-like

chirp. Probably many of them have watched this little feathered midge, and even followed it to its home, to become better acquainted with it; and many of them, no doubt, know all about the little thing, and love it and pet it, as did the little girl that we once asked, which of all the pretty birds that lived in the garden and about her house she loved best. She answered: "The Wren, the little house Wren. Oh! she is such a dear little thing, and *so* neat and *so* lively and *so* smart! Why, she thinks nothing of fighting the great robin; and if the bluebird or swallow comes near her house, phew! doesn't she drive them off quick! and if a hen or cat shows herself in the shrubbery, why, Mrs. Wren seems almost to go crazy, and she fairly scolds them off. But I love the Wren most of all for her confiding in me. She makes her nest in a box close to my chamber-window; and she lets me see all her pretty eggs, and lets me take her pretty comical little ones out of her nest, and don't scold one bit. Oh, yes: I think I love the little Wren better than all the other

birds ;—yes : much better,” she continued thoughtfully.

Such, we believe, is the general feeling among our young folks about this bird ; and although many of them have, perhaps, heard all about its history, and know its habits well, still there are doubtless many more who have had no opportunities for learning about it, and it is for these that we prepare this sketch.

The house Wren makes its appearance in our gardens and orchards by the middle of May, and by the 25th of that month, it begins to prepare a summer home for itself and little ones.

Now the only bad trait in the character of this little bird is its habit of appropriating the house of some of its neighbors, just before they want to lay their own eggs in it, and many of our friends have doubtless condemned it on this account ; but let them not be too hasty. The other birds can build another nest easier and quicker than she, and they are none of them so valuable in the orchard and garden, in destroying the noxious insects that infest

the plants and trees as she, and certainly none are so entertaining in song and habits; and this she knows, and she acts accordingly.

She says, "You must leave these premises immediately; you are well enough in your way, but I am a favorite here, and this tenement I must and will have."

So Mrs. Bluebird, or Mr. and Mrs. Woodpecker, or that sedate old couple the eave swallows, after many remonstrances, leave their comfortable home, and Mr. and Mrs. Wren prepare to move in. But the house needs a deal of preparation. "What an improvident thing Mrs. Bluebird is!" says Mrs. Wren to her husband. "Here she has only a few feathers, and pieces of cotton rags for furniture, and she has taken no pains to provide against the visits of that vile widow Cow Bunting. It will not do at all: there must be a different state of things here!" So the Wrens commence to carry large twigs and thorny sticks to the house, and they arrange them so that no one but themselves can find their way through them; for they have not only to pre-

vent the bluebirds and swallows from taking by stealth their house from over their heads, but they have to arrange its doors and passages so that the enemy of the whole neighborhood, the widow Cow Bunting, cannot find her way in, in case she should call when the Wrens are out.

This widow Cow Bunting, as she is called by the birds, — only from courtesy, or derision perhaps ; for, although she wears the widow's weeds, she never was married, — is disliked by the whole neighborhood ; for, instead of marrying and settling down honestly, and taking care of her own house and family, she, in the most shameful manner, joins the most giddy society, and drops her eggs in the nests of her neighbors to be taken care of by them, as if they didn't have hard enough work to bring up their own families, with every thing as high as it is now-a-days, without adopting the children of others.

The Wrens, then, with an eye to future security, fix their house so that the disgraceful widow cannot enter ; and then they secure all

the feathers and soft hairs and cotton and wool that they can, and with these they make a soft, warm bed for themselves and little ones; for the birds do not agree with modern medical writers, and almost always use feather beds, and do not believe in hair mattresses, spring beds, or *slats*.

Well, after the house is ready for occupancy, the couple move in, and Mrs. Wren soon lays from eight to twelve beautiful pink eggs, all of them covered with fine reddish dots, like dust powdered on them.

Her husband is now all anxiety, and is so nervous and irritable, that if any of his neighbors commit the slightest trespass on his domains, he attacks him in the most furious manner, and soon drives him off in dismay.

As soon as the little Wrens are hatched, the labor of both parents begins, and it is no light matter to provide food for twelve hungry mouths, especially as nothing but the most delicate and nutritious food must be given them; so to work Mr. and Mrs. Wren go, and from morning until night do they have to

gather the eggs of insects, and delicate little caterpillars and beetles and worms, and carry them to the mouths that are always stretched wide open, calling for "more." And is it any wonder that, when night comes, and the parents, before going to sleep, are talking over the incidents and trials of the day, Mrs. Wren, tired almost to death, envies the easy life of the widow Cow Bunting, and almost declares that she will henceforth imitate her? and should we not commend her when she puts the temptation aside, and conducts herself like an honest Wren, as she always is?

And so, day after day, does this worthy couple labor in this work of love. Mrs. Wren has no time to spend before the glass; she cannot, until this family is grown up, change her clothes, and her dress gets ragged and torn. Her husband cannot find time to indulge in a little song, for the moment he strikes up an air, he hears a dozen little voices, in his house, crying, "*Papa, papa, more food;*" so he gets somewhat morose, and goes about silent, and looking a little careworn and shabby.

All the time that his family are to be provided for, they are to be protected. Blue jays and cats are his special abhorrence, particularly the latter. The jays cannot, as a general thing, get into his house, even if they should dare to come to its neighborhood, which they seldom do, as the Wrens usually inhabit a martin-box, or nook in a piazza, or hole in a tree quite close to a dwelling-house. But cats ascend to his nest, and by thrusting in their paws through the twigs, they are able to pull out and devour the whole family. Therefore, the moment a cat shows herself near his home, Mr. Wren flies to meet her, he alights on a shrub close above her head, and scolding and calling her all the hard names possible, he dares her to attack him.

Puss regards her antagonist with contempt, at first; but so persistent is he in his attacks, so closely does he press her, first on one side, then on another, scolding, chattering, grimacing, that, in confusion, she soon turns and moves towards the house; and the occurrences are not rare when the little warrior

actually forces her to run for it, and take refuge in some safe place until the storm is past.

When the young Wrens leave the nest, they follow the parents a few days, depending on them for food and protection; they are soon instructed in the manners and customs of the world, how to get a living, and the manner in which they must take care of themselves, and they are then given their freedom from parental authority and told in plain Wren talk to shift for themselves.

Mr. and Mrs. Wren, after their family are all grown up and off their hands, enjoy the first real comfort that they experience during their stay with us. All their wants are supplied by a bountiful Nature. Their home is among the green trees and beautiful gardens. With no family to protect, their natures lose the nervousness and irritability which rendered them disagreeable to their neighbors, and they now fraternize with, and live in the kindest relations with, them.

During the day, their hours are passed in

wandering in loving companionship among the roses and through the delicious honeysuckles and woodbines. At night, nestling closely together, in some quiet nook, they are lulled to sleep by the zephyrs breathing softly through the foliage of the trees, and by the beautiful song of the whip-poor-will afar off, and the nearer chirping of the cricket and katy-did. And so through all the beautiful summer their lives pass like a fairy dream. And when the first cool nights of September admonish them of the approach of winter, they bid adieu to all their friends and the familiar scenes around them, and leisurely journey to more southern climes, where, among the palms and magnolias, in the warmth and sunshine, they know nothing of the rigors of the season in which many of their neighbors that they left behind them are now struggling.

Truly the Wren should be among the happiest of all created beings ; and are they not ? Let us ask the next one we meet, and see what his answer will be.

OUR BIRDS IN WINTER.



CHAPTER I.

IT was toward the close of a warm afternoon in February, that a small party of birds were observed fluttering among the trees and branches of an old orchard that stood on the southern slope of a hill in Eastern Massachusetts. The weather for the past few days had been warm and genial, and the snow had melted from little hillocks and rocks in many places, exposing to the gaze their surfaces covered with short grass, weeds, or gray lichens and moss. This orchard that the birds were visiting had been much neglected by its thriftless owner, and the limbs and branches were covered with moss and loose bark that furnished comfortable hiding-places for noxious insects, and most convenient resting-places possible for their larvæ, and for the deposit of their eggs.

The birds moved briskly among the branches, hanging sometimes head downwards, peering in the crevices in the bark, and pecking the moss from the limbs, among which were lurking the injurious grubs, or hidden the eggs of moths, that in early spring would hatch into caterpillars.

The movements of the birds were accompanied at quick intervals by cheerful scraps of song, and the whole band was altogether as merry a one as could be well gathered together at once. When I say that nearly all these birds were of a brown and slate color on the back, and of a fawn color and white beneath, each with a black cap that enveloped its whole head, and with black intelligent eyes, that were constantly moving about, sparkling with genuine good nature and vivacity, my readers will doubtless recognize at once those familiar birds, the chick-a-dees.

The remainder of the party, that were not clothed in this manner, were of a light greenish olive above, and yellowish white beneath, with a crown of fiery yellow feathers on their

heads. These were the golden-crested wrens, the constant associates of the chick-a-dees in the winter and early spring months.

At length, when most of the trees had been examined, and the vermin concealed in their branches been discovered and destroyed, the birds assembled on one of the trees in a loosely scattered group, and began arranging and dressing their feathers, opening them and permitting the warm rays of the sun to penetrate them and impart a grateful warmth to their little bodies beneath.

During this interval of rest the time was enlivened by a recital of some of their past experiences, and in planning for the coming season. While the birds were chatting together they were joined by another pair, Mr. and Mrs. Chick-a-dee, that had been very industriously engaged in pecking off a large piece of bark from a neighboring apple-tree, beneath which were laid a great number of insect eggs. As they joined the party, one of the wrens observed that "Really they were very industrious; they labored so hard that

Farmer Murray, the owner of the orchard, should treat them to the best in his power, and protect them from their old enemies, the snakes; they were deserving of his warmest gratitude."

"Gratitude!" answered Mr. Chick-a-dee, somewhat contemptuously, "who ever heard of a farmer's being grateful for a chick-a-dee's labors in his orchards, and yet how could they get along without us? Why, they would be completely overrun with insects if it were not for us, and see how scurvily he treats us; it is almost enough to make one leave civilization entirely, and live altogether in the woods."

"True enough," answered another of the group, "I believe men are among the most ungratèful of created beings; not the farmers alone, but all classes and trades. I have seen a little of their ingratitude, and want as little to do with them as possible."

"Yes!" said one of the Wrens, "I came near losing my life through a man's ingratitude, even when I had really saved his own."

"How was that?" inquired several.

“Relate the incident, and I will give an experience that I once had,” added one of the Chick-a-dees.

“It happened at a long distance from here,” answered the Wren, “in what is called the Hudson’s Bay country. You know that my wife and myself passed last spring and summer there, and reared a family of four young ones. It was on one June day that I was searching the woods for materials for our nest. I had found an old dead wolf that had been shot and wounded, and had strayed off by itself and died. I had pulled several bunches of hair from his hide, and carried them to our nest, and was returning for more, when behind a large rock I saw a panther crouching, apparently watching for some approaching object. At the same instant I heard a twig crack, and looking in the direction of the sound, saw Mr. Littleton, the naturalist connected with one of the trading posts of that country, drawing near, his gaze directed on the tree above him, following a Red-Poll Warbler to its nest. I knew if he followed the bird any further in my

direction, he would fall a victim to the panther ; and feeling that his good wife, who had once kindly befriended me, would be terribly afflicted at such a catastrophe, I resolved to try to turn him from his course. I had no time for a choice of expedients : I must act at once. I immediately, therefore, attacked the Red Poll, who was fluttering in the foliage in the trees above, and after considerable of a skirmish, in which I got two or three severe blows, for I am a little body, and a slight stroke is sufficient to hurt me, I succeeded in turning Red Poll from her course, and actually drove her a considerable distance off into the woods, away from the panther. Mr. Littleton, enraged at my interference in his pursuits, pointed his gun at me several times in order to take my life, but I was careful to keep Red Poll between us, as I knew he was anxious to find her nest. While he was following us, he suddenly startled a hare from its covert, which, running in the direction of the panther, fell a victim to its hunger. Mr. Littleton, ignorant of the narrow escape he had had, continued to

follow us, and I am sure if I had not at once flown away, I should have been shot. So much for man's ingratitude."

"Yes," answered the Chick-a-dee who had first spoken: "my adventure was somewhat similar. It was in this wise. It was during a warm day in the latter part of last June, that, as I was flying about in an old huckleberry pasture, in search of food, I discovered, lying on a moss-covered rock, under the shade of a huge chestnut, a man who had lain down and fallen asleep. I alighted in the tree to take a good look at him, for you know we Chick-a-dees are all curious bodies, and like to know all that is going on. I had scarcely reached the tree when I discovered, slowly moving in the direction of the man, an enormous rattle-snake, much larger than the one that came near catching old Mr. Chick-a-dee here last summer; you remember, do you not?" he asked of his neighbor.

"Yes," answered the other; "and I shall not soon forget the fright I had."

"Well," continued the speaker, "my first

movement was to fly off, and get out of harm's way, for I remembered your narrow escape; but I thought that would not only be mean but injudicious, for how many birds would be killed and eaten by the monster during the season, who could tell. So I at once resolved to awaken the man. I shouted down to him from the tree, and made all the noise I could, but to no purpose: he slept soundly. The snake was slowly approaching him, and was but a few yards off, when I flew down to the man, and gave him a vigorous bite on the ear. Gracious! what a rage he was in when he awoke and saw me flying up into the tree above him; he knew that it was I that awoke him, and seizing a stone, he threw it at me with such precision that it struck on the limb beneath me, and within an inch of my breast; the shock was sufficient almost to stun me, and I was almost sorry that I took so much trouble with him.

“At this moment the snake began to rattle, and throwing itself into a coil, awaited the approach of the man; fortunately he saw the

reptile, and taking a club, soon killed it. I flew off, feeling indignant at the man's ungrateful treatment of me, and if I see another in such a predicament, I will think twice before I awaken him."

Here the speaker ruffled his feathers in indignation, and most of his auditors moved about on their perches nervously, and apparently sharing with his disgust. Old Mr. Chick-a-dee, after a pause, during which the birds had resumed their composure, and were some trimming their feathers, others paying little attentions to their neighbors, or twittering little compliments that only good-dispositioned and amiable birds know any thing about, addressed them as follows: —

"I have been paying attention to your narratives, and think that, although you both have a little cause for complaint, still it seems to me that the action of the men, in both cases, was not the result of ingratitude in the strictest sense, since neither of them knew all your motives, but acted hastily and without reflection. Man's ingratitude to birds as a class

is shown in a different way. What I call ungrateful is to receive our services through the year, and deny us, particularly those valuable birds, the Thrushes, Robins, and others who love the taste of a cherry or strawberry now and then, and richly earn them, the poor privilege of eating a few when we wish; that is base ingratitude, and we would serve the whole race of mankind rightly if we should, for a season, have nothing to do with him; leave his farms and gardens and fields to their destruction, and let him see, then, which can do without the other. I am of the opinion that he would be right glad to get us back, and I think we should not hear any thing more of the mischief of birds. But we will not act thus unkindly; it is better to suffer in a good cause than to glory in a bad one. But it is growing late, we had better procure our suppers and retire, and to-morrow we will meet again in this place, and make our arrangements for the coming season."

At these words the party scattered among the trees, and after a hearty repast, moved off

in a party to a thicket of cedars and pines, in whose thick foliage, protected from the coldness of the night winds, they sought the rest that is always most grateful to all the inhabitants of the forest.



CHAPTER II.

THE next morning was bright, and for the season mild and comfortable. The birds were astir early, as usual, and their cheerful notes enlivened the woods in all directions. Mr. and Mrs. Chick-a-dee, with a few particular friends, separated from the main body, and followed a ravine that was watered by a small brook, down to a swamp, that, being surrounded by hills on all sides, afforded a most comfortable retreat for the feathered inhabitants of the woods through the winter.

The warm water of the brook coming from the springs that dotted the sides of the ravine, and the genial rays of the sun, had melted the

snow on the ground of most of the swamp; and in many places little tufts of green grass were visible, and little pools of water surrounded by mud and decaying leaves were scattered here and there, many of them already teeming with insect life, the larvæ of the Caddis-flies and May-flies and dragon-flies, each and all ready to be eaten by the myriads of birds that shortly were to make their appearance in this neighborhood. The Chick-a-dees, having eaten of a hearty breakfast, were enjoying a bath in a little pool, on which the rays of the sun shone with a grateful warmth.

“Really, my dear Chick,” observed one of the party who was fluttering on the edge of the pool, shaking and drying his plumage that had been lately disarranged in the bath, “it seems to me that our winter is leaving us in a hurry; such delicious weather one rarely sees at this season, and it is almost enough to make one begin to look about for a companion for the summer, and prepare for a nesting-place.” Here he cast a languishing glance at

a young female, the daughter of Chick-a-dee beside him, who fluttered her wings and tossed her head in the most charming coquetry. "I declare I am almost in a perspiration," he continued, "the weather is so warm."

"Pooh!" ejaculated Chick, "you're in love, and the warmth of your passion is so great that you really suffer from the heat: now don't say a word," he added as the other made a deprecativè movement; "we have been watching you in your attention to our daughter, and believe you deserving of each other: take her, then, and be happy. Bless you, my children. Not one word: of course, you are about to thank me for my kindness in helping you out of your embarrassment, and in giving my consent to your engagement before I am asked, but I know how much I suffered when I was courting my good wife here, and how much I would have given if I had had some one to help me in my suit; therefore I don't want one word of thanks, but keep your sweet words for your companion: she will doubtless need them before the summer is passed; for,

what with the boys robbing our nests, and cats eating our young, and villanous bird-stuffers killing us for ornaments for the ladies' hats, it is really a hard world to get along in nowadays, and a body often gets cross and discouraged. If I hadn't one of the best helpmates in the world," here he gave Mrs. Chick a playful peck on the shoulder, "I should have been outrageous many times during this last summer; but I have tried to please her, for I couldn't but admire her many excellent qualities; and, as I have not heard her complain, I hope she has not been dissatisfied: hey! Mrs. Chick?" he added, turning to her.

"No, dear," answered that estimable female. "You have been the best hubby in the world, and I too often feel how undeserving I am of your kindness."

"Pooh, pooh!" hastily answered Chick, "you are too indulgent and do not notice my many faults; but a truce to compliments. My young friend," here his remarks were addressed to the loving swain before him, "our best wishes are for your happiness and well-

being, and the worst wish we have for you, that you will take as much comfort in matrimony as we have done. But whom have we here?" he exclaimed, as he for the first time perceived Mr. Woodcock, who was quietly sitting in a little clump of grass, and listening to the conversation. "Why, upon my word, it is Old Woodcock, who lived in the swamp near us last summer."

"So it is," said all the others, as they crowded around him; "and when did you return from the south, and where is Mrs. Woodcock, and where did you leave our friends, and how are they all?" were the questions that were rained upon the stranger.

"Softly, softly," he answered; "don't be outrageous to a body; you must remember that I have travelled a long distance, and that my mental as well as physical powers are somewhat fatigued; please be quiet, and I will endeavor to satisfy you all." Here he thrust his bill into the mud, and pulled out a worm, which he swallowed. The other birds took their positions on the surrounding bushes and

low trees; the young Chick-a-dees sat in a low juniper, where they could caress each other without all the world seeing them.

Woodcock, seeing his audience composed, commenced to answer their questions in detail. Your Woodcock is a quiet, sedate individual, rarely permitting himself to get flustered or nervous. He would be a good body for a president of a bird senate, or chairman of a legislative committee, and could always draft a *long bill*. I don't know but what he was distinguished as a public character in Europe, since he is often spoken of in connection with a *diet of worms* (*Diet of Wurms*).

"I arrived here only last night," he began, "and I don't know but I am over-adventurous in coming north so early; but the genial weather awakened in my breast a most ardent longing to return to my pleasant home, and I resolved to venture, even if I should be overtaken by a cold snap again, as I was once two springs ago. You remember, — do you not?" he asked of Chick, — "how my wife and myself came here early in March, when the weather

was delicious as now, and how we had even prepared our nesting-place, when a terrible snow-storm covered the ground, and forced us back again to a more southern locality."

"Yes," answered Chick, "and I remember that at the same time some Yellow Rumps got caught in the same storm and came near starving."

"I determined to start," resumed Woodcock, "for I not only longed to get back to these scenes, but I was lonely; I missed my mate, and life at the south was really a burden to me."

"But where is Mrs. W.?" hastily inquired several of the other birds; "we have looked for her, but do not see her with you."

"No: she is not with me, and we never shall meet her again in this world: she is dead!" here the poor soul "dropped a silent tear."

"Dead!" echoed the others in amazement, "why, what was the matter with her? When she left us she was in the best of health and spirits, and did not look as if she would lose

a feather until next summer." Here the party exchanged flutterings of sympathy and condolence with each other.

"She did not die a natural death," answered Woodcock, sorrowfully, "although I don't know but that shooting is a natural one to us poor devils of game birds. She fell a victim to man's cruel rapacity, and wicked appetites, and it was by the merest chance that I escaped with a whole skin."

"Poor thing," said several of his listeners, "how much you have had to suffer."

"We sympathize with you fully," said Chick, "and wish we could comfort you."

"And have your children all left you?" inquired another. "I should think that they might keep you company in your wretchedness."

"Alas, they too are dead," answered Woodcock. "I am alone. You all know how happy a family we were, when we left here last October, how much we were attached to each other, how kindly we shared the margins of pools and mud-holes in swamps with each other.

That happiness is over, and I must wander on alone, expecting every moment to fall a victim myself to the wickedness of the gunners."

"Oh, the wretches!" indignantly said Mrs. Chick, "how much they have to answer for, killing and murdering all the time, permitting no living creature to enjoy life but themselves; as if they, the brutes, owned the world, and all others were intruders, subject to their caprice and pleasure; oh! it puts me out of all patience," and the dear creature could hardly control her anger.

"Where did the terrible calamity happen?" inquired Chick; "if it is not too sorrowful a subject for you to dwell upon, we would like to hear about it." His countenance was lightened by a kindly expression of sympathy and respect for Woodcock's sorrows, and showed that his questions were not dictated by an idle curiosity.

"It was in Connecticut in a lovely spot near the Connecticut River. I did not know until too late that it was a favorite resort for sportsmen, or I should have given it a wide

berth. We were reposing in a little swamp that had furnished us with an abundance of food, and were enjoying the grateful rays of the sun as they penetrated our feathers. Suddenly we heard the cracking of sticks and twigs near us, and the voices of men talking together and to some animals that were moving about us. All at once one of the animals came near us, and, peering above the foliage I saw a white and brown dog with long silky hair, looking intently in our direction, apparently pointing us out to its master who was drawing near. Immediately the man, on perceiving the dog, began to hurry toward it, saying, 'Steady! Toho, steady!' Before we could conjecture the meaning of the man's words, he was joined by one of his companions, when he said to the traitorous beast, 'Put 'em out, old dog,' and at the instant the dog sprang at us; half dead with fright, we flew up, when the men discharged their guns at us. Several of my companions fell, but I was fortunate enough to escape, although I heard the shot hissing by me almost within

my wings. I have never seen one of my family since, and I have no doubt that they are all dead, as I heard several shots afterwards. Thus was I bereaved in a few moments of all I held most dear on earth." Here Woodcock gave a great sigh, and lapsed into a moody silence.

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Chick-a-dee, "we were cruel to call up to his mind the recollection of his great afflictions."

"Let us try to turn his thoughts to more cheerful subjects," said her husband. "By the way," he exclaimed turning to Woodcock, "you forgot to tell us how you left our friends of last summer. How are the Cat Birds, and where are they stopping?"

"Oh! when I saw them last we were in Mexico, and they were jolly; they were thinking of spending the winter in Central America with their good neighbors the Brown Thrushes."

"What! are the Browns in Central America?" asked Chick.

"Yes," answered the other; "and so are

our old friends, the Yellow Warblers, and Wrens, and those dear souls, the Red-eyed Vireos; they are all enjoying themselves, and are fat and hearty and send much love to their friends at the north."

"Bless them," said Mrs. Chick, "how I long to see them again; but it is almost noon, and we shall have to leave you for the present. Good-by, Mr. Woodcock, we will call, on our way back, this afternoon, and have another little chat with you."

At these words, the whole flock took wing, and left Woodcock to his thoughts and the quiet of the swamp.



CHAPTER III.

The warmth of the sun was so grateful, that, left to himself, his eyes soon closed in slumber, from which he was awakened after the expiration of a short hour, by the crackling of sticks, and the apparent approach of a larger bird than any that we have yet met.

Attentively regarding the direction from which the noise came, he soon discovered one of his former friends and neighbors, Ruffed Grouse, who had come into the swamp to visit the open spots of wet earth and mud ; for your Grouse loves to examine such places, and he culls a great part of his food from them in the latter part of winter and early spring.

Calling out to the new-comer, Woodcock was soon joined by him, when, after the usual salutations, they sat down together on a little patch of moss and grass, and entered into conversation.

“Really, my dear Grouse,” began the Woodcock, “it is quite refreshing to meet you again, to know that you have escaped the murderous attacks of all your enemies. It seems to me that you and I have hardly a single friend in the whole world, and, what with men, foxes, weasels, skunks, hawks, and owls, our lives are a constant misery. I was but a short time ago telling our friends the Chick-a-dees how I was desolated by the murder of my whole family, and they agreed



THE MEETING IN THE SWAMP.

with me that we birds have a hard time of it."

"Yes," answered Grouse, "you are right. It is enough to have to deal with our natural enemies of the woods; but man, by a multiplicity of devices, seems determined to destroy us outright. You know how terribly destructive he is with the gun; but you Woodcocks can know nothing of the fearful efficiency of his snares."

"No! we know nothing about traps: the gun carries desolation enough among our families. But where are *your* children and Mrs. Grouse? They haven't all been destroyed like my own family, I trust?"

"Alas, yes," answered Grouse, "I am desolate; the gun first, afterwards the snare, and finally the cruel elements, have made me a lonely wanderer through the pastures and woods. And you, Woodcock, you say you are alone; how were your family destroyed?"

"By man," replied Woodcock; "my whole family fell victims to his rapacity, and I but escaped with a whole skin. But tell me about

the snares you speak of. I would wish to know how to recognize them, and be able to avoid them."

"I don't know that I can describe them so that you can recognize them, and there are several kinds. One, the most common, is made somewhat after this manner. I watched a fellow making it, from the foliage of a pine, near by, and have a tolerable idea of it. First he selected a small sapling, that was straight and springy, and trimmed off all the branches, for nearly its whole length; he then cut it off at a height of perhaps his head from the ground when he was standing up, and, bending it down, drove into the ground exactly below its upper end a crotched stick that he cut from another sapling. He then fastened a cord to the upper end of the sapling; about midway on this cord was a short stick or button, and at the end of the cord was a slip-knot or noose; he passed the button under the crotch that was driven into the ground, and, fixing it perpendicularly in the crotch, held it in place by putting under the lower end a slender piece of stick or spindle.

“You may believe that my attention was fixed to the utmost in watching him; for I was ignorant of the real character of the thing he was making, although I, of course, expected something wrong. When he had fixed the button so that it would play readily through the crotch, he stretched out the noose on the cord and kept it open by thrusting down little pieces of twigs into the earth within it. Thus you see that the snare was completed, or rather was when he fixed on the end of the slender stick, beneath the button, a piece of apple. I did not see into the diabolical trap even when it was finished, and how should I? I must confess that I wanted to taste the apple that the man had left so temptingly exposed, but I mistrusted something wrong in it, and moreover one of our neighbors, the crows, flying over, spying it, cried out, ‘Beware! it is a trap!’ You know that the crows always mistrust a string. I flew down from the tree to the spring to get a drink of water, when the man went away, and was just about going to the snare to

inspect it, when who should I see but my wife just on the point of pecking the apple. She had come to it in the path, and suspected nothing wrong. Before I could cry out to her, or stop her, she had touched the apple, when, with a sudden spring, like a snake encircling a young bird in its deadly folds, the snare sprung, and poor Mrs. Grouse was fluttering in the air, hanging in the deadly noose. I could not release her: she was soon dead. Half frantic with sorrow, I turned to the apple, when the whole secret of the snare flashed upon me. I could see how by touching the apple, the button was released from the crotch, and, as she had to put her head through the noose, why! she could not possibly escape.

“I hastened to what there was left of my children, or rather my wife’s children, for she had all the responsibility of rearing them, and explained to them the whole plan of this snare; but, alas! we could not foresee that there were other kinds of traps, and it was not until one of my best sons was caught, that I knew any thing about them.”

“Really, my dear Grouse,” interrupted Woodcock, “you make my blood run cold with your accounts of the infernal machines invented for the destruction of the birds. I shall hardly dare to move in the woods for fear of being snapped up.”

“You need have no fear,” answered Grouse, “for it is when you happy Woodcocks are away from these northern woods, that snares are set, and it is very rarely indeed that they are placed in the woods when you are here. Excuse me one moment; I espy a beetle creeping under those dead leaves; let me catch him.” Suiting the action to the words, he killed and swallowed the insect, and, returning to his position near Woodcock, resumed his remarks. “The snare that caught my child was of different construction from the other, but it was equally fatal. I did not see it made, but it was formed simply by-driving or pushing into the ground a long row of limbs of trees, with their foliage on, forming a natural obstruction, that no Grouse would attempt to creep through, but one would most natu-

rally walk along it until he came to an opening in it, or reached its end. The trapper, knowing this, left a passage open about midway in the hedge, and in this opening fixed a noose that was fastened to a springing sapling, like the other I mentioned. This noose was barely caught on the sides of the passage in the hedge, and when my chick put his head in it, innocently enough, he drew it about his neck. In his efforts to release himself, he drew it tighter, when it suddenly sprung, and he was swinging in the air in a moment, a lifeless Grouse.

“Not knowing which way to turn, we flew, half frantic, to the depths of the woods, and hardly dared to move for two or three days. Such horrible deaths in our family, in one day, made a lasting impression on us, and we never passed a bent sapling after that but we gave it a wide berth.”

Here the afflicted Grouse gave a huge sigh, and began furiously picking and trimming some broken feathers on his breast, that looked a little rough and careless. Woodcock, know-

ing that it would not be well to interrupt him, kept silence, and began looking about in the mud near the pool, for worms and leeches for his supper. At last, Grouse resumed his composure, and continued his story.

“We were reduced now to three children,” he said, “and myself, and we hoped to keep our little family together for the remainder of the season. Snares could not catch us, we thought, and as for guns, we had no fear of them, for we had learned to keep a safe distance from all men, and we always flew off, the moment we heard a heavy step in the woods.

“For a few days we got along very well, and we began to recover our spirits, that had had such fearful shocks. One day, however, we were again afflicted, and we gave up all hope. It had been raining all day, and was pouring harder than ever towards night, when we came to an old log in the woods that was lifted from the ground for half its length, and thus afforded a comfortable shelter from the storm. Running ahead of me, full of glee at

discovering this safe retreat, one of my remaining chicks entered beneath the log, and jumped on a low stick that offered a comfortable perch for him. At the instant the log fell with a crash upon him, and he was killed,—it was but another sort of trap, the stick he jumped on being the key to it.

“You may imagine the consternation we were in. On every side a trap seemed to offer its deathly embrace,—we knew not where to turn. With the greatest haste we flew from the spot, and until late in the winter we frequented no place in the woods that would be likely to be visited by man. At last, I was robbed of my two remaining children by a cruel snow-storm, and I have wandered until now alone.”

“How could your young ones be killed in a snow-storm?” inquired Woodcock. “I thought you Grouse strong enough to be able to weather almost any storm; you know I pass my winters in the south, and know nothing of the extreme rigors of your winter.”

“You have doubtless heard,” answered

Grouse, "that it is much warmer beneath the snow than it is above it, where the chill winds can reach one."

"I have," replied Woodcock, "and have often thought how nice it would be, to be covered up by the snow until the cold weather had gone."

"Well," continued the other, "we Grouse who live in the woods take advantage of this protection, and, huddled together, we allow the snow to cover us, and we live quite comfortably for three or four days, without any food; but it sometimes happens that the snow turns to rain just before the close of the storm, and the weather then changes to freezing, when the surface of the snow turns to ice, and we are imprisoned in the crystal sheet. It was in this manner that my two young ones lost their lives, and I had a narrow escape. We remained beneath the ice four days, when, unable to break the crust, and famished for the want of food, they exhausted themselves with their efforts to escape, and were unable to recover. I saw them die before me, and could

render them no assistance. I trust you may never have so sad an experience. On the fifth morning the sun came out bright and warm, and melted the ice, so that I was able, with much exertion, to break my way through it. I think I never shall forget those cruel four days of imprisonment ; as for my children, I have since thought they are better off as they are. But you have been listening all this time to the tale of my afflictions, and now you must give me a little account of yours, that is, if the memory of them is not too much for you to bear."

"No: I will tell you about my troubles ; the story is but a short one, and I cannot, in justice to you, refrain from telling it."

Woodcock here commenced the narration of the death of his wife and young ones ; but, as my readers are already familiar with it, we will not repeat it.

At its close, Grouse offered his sympathies to his afflicted friend, and they were reciprocated by Woodcock for the troubles of the other. As it was now drawing to the close of

the afternoon, they began busying themselves in procuring food for their supper, and soon they were joined by the Chick-a-dees and Wrens, who were returning to their roosting-place in the cedars beyond the swamp.

“Well, my dear Woodcock,” said old Mr. Chick-a-dee, who was the first to arrive, “I hope that you have passed a pleasant day, and that you have not found our climate so cold that you cannot remain with us now through the summer.”

“Oh, no,” replied Woodcock: “I have been quite comfortable, indeed, and have had the company of our friend Grouse, here, ever since you left me. He has been giving me an account of his troubles, and really, I pity him, and I am sure I can sympathize with him.”

“Ah, good Mr. Grouse!” said Mrs. Chick-a-dee, now for the first time seeing the stranger, “how do you do? We haven’t seen you since the loss of your children, about which we heard from the Pine Finches. We are very sorry for you: it is very, very sad.” Here the dear creature was visibly affected,

and her husband, seeing it, judiciously turned the conversation.

“But, my dear Woodcock,” he said, “you must have brought all our other summer friends with you, for we have seen old Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird, and heard the Robins and Swamp Blackbirds; really, it begins to seem like old times to have so many good friends back again.”

“Yes: and who do you think passed us in a flock to-day but the Cedar Birds,” added Mrs. Chick; “they were in a great hurry, and hardly noticed us, but we saw them, and they looked the same as ever.”

“I should think you would be pleased to see the wanderers back again,” replied Woodcock, “for it must be horridly dismal here through the winter.”

“Oh, it is not so bad after all!” answered one of the Wrens, “we are provided by nature with good, comfortable clothes, and have no difficulty in finding plenty to eat, and as for company, why! we, with the Chick-a-dees, make quite a crowd; and then there are the

Snow Birds and Woodpeckers and Nut-hatches, and I don't know who else. We don't have such a lonely time of it, I can tell you."

"No: and we have the pleasure of the society of our wives and sweethearts all the year round," said the young Chick-a-dee that we spoke of as being engaged to old Chick's daughter: "that is a comfort that many of the summer wanderers lose; but what under the sun are the Pine Finches scattering and shouting so about?" he asked, looking up into the sky at some small birds that were flying about in different directions, apparently in great confusion. "Good gracious, it is a Shrike after them! hide, all of you!" and, suiting the action to the word, he dived into a thicket that was near; the other small birds imitated his example, and in an instant the whole company, with the exception of Grouse and Woodcock, were completely hidden from sight. In a few minutes the Pine Finches became quiet, having settled in a tree that stood near by, which old Mr. Chick observing, he came forth

from his covert, and, seeing that all danger was past, he called to his companions, who soon joined him.

“I don’t blame you for hiding in such a hurry,” said Grouse, “for those Shrikes are villainous birds. I have seen some of their capers, and am thankful that I am too large for them. But I must leave you now, for I have some distance to go to get to my favorite covert, and it is getting late. I shall see more of you this coming spring and summer, and as for you, Mr. Woodcock, I hope to see you often. Good-by, all of you; take good care of yourselves.”

So saying, Grouse left the party, who returned his polite words with similar courtesies. In a few moments the party was joined by a few Snow Birds and the Pine Finches, from whom they inquired about the recent flurry.

“It was an attack by one of those rascally Shrikes,” answered one of the Pine Finches to their inquiries. “We were flying over to Pine Hill for our supper, when the pirate

made a pounce among us, and captured one of our party before we had a chance to escape. Oh that we small birds had strength and courage enough to combine, and put to death our wicked oppressors! We shall never have a moment's comfort until we do something of the sort."

"That's true," added one of the Snow Birds, "and something should be done soon. I am tired of living in such constant dread, and have got about discouraged. I had a hard time of it with my family last summer, and was the only one in our neighborhood that succeeded in raising my children."

"Indeed! how was that?" inquired several of the group.

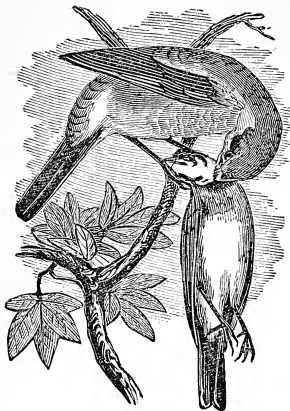
"I will tell you; we have a short time to spare, and we cannot better employ it than by comparing our sorrows and troubles." Care is never so easily borne as when supported by the troubles of a neighbor. "You doubtless know, many of you, that I passed last summer and fall in the neighborhood of Wilson's Mills,

in the north-western part of Maine; this is a small settlement on the Magalloway River, a beautiful stream that empties into the Androscoggin, near Lake Umbagog, and is the last collection of human dwellings on the river, and, indeed, below the Canada line. You all know that it is much pleasanter to make our home near human habitations; for, in addition to what company we have in the labors of the busy farmers, there is a sort of security or rather protection from our many foes, that we feel they render us.

“ Well, a party of us Snow Birds built our nests in an old cart-road, or rather lumber-path, near what is called Diamond Brook, below Wilson’s Mills, and got along swimmingly. My companions all placed their nests in the grass and weeds in the road itself; but I, who had seen more of the world, hesitated to live in so exposed a place, and, my husband agreeing with me, we concluded to build our nest in the side of a mossy knoll near the road, but pretty effectually hidden

by hackmetack and arbor-vitæ bushes that hung over it. Well, we hatched our young ones and got them about half grown, when my neighbors were discovered by a pair of Canada Jays that lived a short distance from us ; and, if you will believe me, the wretches, in one day, killed and ate the young birds in all four of the nests of my friends. Ah ! 'twas a sad day, and never shall I forget it. But the wicked act was not long to be unavenged ; for, even while the Jays were carrying off the last of their victims, a naturalist, who was stopping at Mr. Wilson's, came along, and hearing our outcries, hurried to us, and saw at once what had happened ; for he had noticed before that our little colony, and was interested in its success. In an instant, he fired at the pirates, and they dropped dead among us. Yes : the Jays and Shrikes are wicked wretches, and we ought to take some action against them."

"By the way, speaking of the Shrikes," said one of the Pine Finches, "I never could understand one of their habits,—that of hang-



Shrike and his Victim.

ing their victims on thorns, and leaving them for days at a time, unless they kill them out of wanton destructiveness, and having no appetite to eat them, leave them until they decay. What do you think of it, Mr.

Wren?" he asked,

of one of the others: "you see more of those birds than we, and know more of their habits."

"To tell you the truth," replied Wren, "I haven't quite made up my mind, but have about concluded that they do it as a sort of provision for future wants. Many of you have, doubtless, seen the Blue Jays save up chestnuts and acorns in crevices in the bark of trees, for this purpose, and why shouldn't the Shrikes do the same?"

"It seems, however, to be more of an instinctive than rational act; for I have known

a Shrike to hang a mouse or mole on a thorn, and leave it there until it had decayed, and fallen to pieces, without eating it. However, as it is, it is a hateful habit, and one that no respectable bird would have. But it is growing late, and we must to our roosting-places. Come, friends, let us bid good-by to Mr. Woodcock, here, who, I perceive, is growing tired of us, and retire."

"No, no," hastily said Woodcock: "I should be delighted to have you remain longer."

"We would like to," answered Chick, "but we must go; so good-night, old fellow, keep up a good heart, and it will soon be warm weather again." So saying, Chick and his companions left the scene, and in a short time all was still and quiet in the swamp; for Woodcock, although accustomed to wandering in the night, knew that at this early season all food that he might seek for would be deep in the mud beyond his reach, and, moreover, being tired, was not sorry to sleep; so, cuddling up close to a rock that had been exposed to the rays of the sun through the

day, and now retained much of the warmth that had been shed on it, he was soon lost in the land of dreams.



CHAPTER IV.

THE morning sun had just begun to gild the fleecy clouds in the east on the succeeding day, when our friends were astir, busy in the old orchard and among the scattered trees on the hillside in their search for a breakfast. Soon their wants were satisfied, when the birds, at old Chick-a-dee's suggestion, flew at once to the swamp where they had left Mr. Woodcock on the evening before. What was their surprise to find that he had for a companion a Mrs. Woodcock, whose husband and family were killed the summer before by a prowling fox. Woodcock, who was in earnest and familiar conversation with the widow, when they were joined by the other birds, was not a little confused to be thus caught ;

and his confusion was not abated by the significant glances that he observed passing between the visitors. Fortunately, he had some news with which he could turn the attention of the others from himself and Mrs. Woodcock, and he lost no time in telling it.

“Such a surprise as I have for you,” he said; “you can’t guess who visited me this morning, and who will shortly be here again. Who but old Pine Grosbeak,” answered Woodcock, “that was captured last year by a boy, in a trap, and kept in confinement until now. He has escaped, and is now looking for some of his friends; but here he comes,” and Grosbeak at that moment joined the group.

When the shower of welcomes and eager inquiries with which he was greeted had subsided, he gave a full account of his imprisonment and his escape. When he had finished, all the party were warm in their congratulations, and he could not but be pleased at finding that he had so many friends.

“And isn’t it hard that we should be thus persecuted?” asked Chick-a-dee, when all

was still ; “ not content with injuring and killing us, men will not hesitate to imprison us, and keep us for years away from our friends and relatives. They seem to have no affection for us at all, notwithstanding all the good we do them.”

“ I don’t know about that,” answered Grosbeak, “ there are many men who really appreciate and love us ; and I will say that the family I lived with treated me with the greatest kindness and attention. If I had not wanted my freedom, I don’t know of any life in which I could have been happier. Sometimes we fall into the hands of those who do not treat us so well ; and Crossbill, who was confined near me, and who escaped about the same time, had a hard life of it.”

“ What ! has Crossbill escaped ? ” inquired some of his listeners. “ We had about given him up.”

“ Yes ! ” answered Grosbeak, “ he has escaped, and must be somewhere in this neighborhood ; for he accompanied me to within a few miles of here. But I was saying that

some men love us, and they do; why! while I was imprisoned in my captor's house, I heard stories told about us that were flattering in the highest degree. One story that I heard — although about a bird with which we have no acquaintance — shows that we are not considered unworthy to be employed in teaching valuable lessons, either by men or spirits; and I will tell this story to you now, but you must promise not to interrupt me while I am telling it, and I will explain all that you do not understand, when it is finished."

The other birds prepared themselves for the recital of the story, by each getting comfortable perches near some friend or sweetheart or mate. Woodcock led his friend, Mrs. Woodcock, to a comfortable seat in a little bunch of moss and grass, and took his place beside her; thus braving out the suspicions that he knew his neighbors had already begun to entertain. Grosbeak, when he saw every one quiet, began the story of —

CHAPTER V.

SPINETTE, THE FAIRY.

“MANY years ago there lived in the great pine forest of Sweden, an old woodchopper, named, from the great integrity of his character, ‘Honest Tobin.’ He was very poor, and, from the unprofitable nature of his trade, had to labor very hard to support himself, his wife, and two sons. He could barely furnish the necessaries of life for them, and found it impossible to provide his boys with books, and pay for their education ; for there were no free schools, and those who wished to learn had to pay a considerable fee for the privilege of attending the small schools kept by the priests in the monastery, a few miles distant. Tobin often regretted his inability to provide his boys with even a year’s schooling ; for he well knew and appreciated the value of an education. But, as there was no prospect of his condition being improved, he very wisely re-

frained from repining before them at the hardness of his lot, as that would only raise in their minds feelings of dissatisfaction, and would accomplish no good. But he often, after the boys were in bed and asleep, talked over the matter with his good wife, and they tried to devise some plan by which they could raise a little money, and send them to Stockholm to learn some useful trade, and be able, perhaps, to educate themselves ; but they could come to no feasible plan, and, one night, after a long discussion, they retired discouraged, resolving to let the matter rest, and agitate it no further, since they were unable to accomplish any thing. But the good fairy, Spinette, who chanced to be flying abroad in the form of a night-moth, her favorite disguise, alighted on the window-sill of Tobin's house, while the woodchopper and his wife were talking, and, hearing the whole conversation, resolved to do something to help the honest old couple. Fairies in those days were gifted with great powers, and generally used them, when they found a worthy object, discreetly,

and for a good purpose. Spinnette determined to see if the boys were deserving of her favor before she befriended them. At this time, Oscar, the youngest, was sixteen years of age, a fine, manly, young fellow with deep-blue eyes, a graceful form, and a pleasant, smiling countenance. Henry, the other, was seventeen, more firmly built than his brother, with dark-hazel eyes, and a thoughtful countenance that often wore a sulky look, if any thing displeased him.

“ Spinnette, early in the morning, the next day after her visit to Tobin’s cottage, took the form of a Greenfinch with a broken wing, and, placing herself by the spring from which the woodman’s family carried all the water used in their house, awaited the approach of one of the family. The first to come was Henry, his father having sent him for water. Now, unless he felt in the humor, he particularly disliked going on this errand, and to-day he was uncommonly opposed to going; but, as his father insisted, of course he had to obey: he was, therefore, in ill temper, and when the

wounded bird fluttered in the path before him, instead of caring for it, he, to vent his spite, kicked it roughly into the bushes. In doing this, he ran a thorn deep into his foot, and, if the Finch had not fluttered off out of his reach, it would have paid with its life for his rage.

“Henry returned to the house with the water, and pretty soon he went off to the woods, limping, with his father. Oscar remained at home on that day to help his mother in her brewing; before the forenoon was half passed, more water was needed, and Oscar went to bring it.

“As he approached the spring, sauntering along carelessly, singing and whistling, the bird fluttered before him in the path, as it had done to Henry. He stopped and looked at it, when it fluttered its broken wing and chirped, apparently in great pain. Oscar carefully took the wounded bird in his hand, and tenderly stroked its feathers, lifting the broken wing into place; he then filled his pail and returned to the house, where he showed his prize to his mother, saying, ‘See! mother, a

Greenfinch with a broken wing. I'm very sorry; how much the poor thing must suffer! I will nurse it, and try to heal it; and, when it is well, I will give it its freedom, for it would be cruel to keep it confined when it must love its liberty.' So he made a little cage of strips of thin boards, and putting in it a nice soft nest, and some crumbs, and clean cold water, he placed the bird in the nest,—watched it for a while,—then left it, and went to help his mother, returning occasionally to see how his pet got along.

“This exhibition of good nature and tender disposition was very pleasing to Spinnette, the fairy, and she resolved that Oscar should be the first to feel the benefits of her friendliness for the old woodman.

“At noon, when his father and brother returned from their labor in the forest, Oscar showed his prize to them: his father commended his action; but Henry, feeling the pain of the thorn in his foot, which had troubled him all the forenoon, and feeling revengeful, scornfully laughed at Oscar's folly,

as he called it, and said he would have been more sensible if he had wrung the bird's neck. Oscar, knowing the disposition of Henry, felt that his words were unreasonable, and, although he did not fully know their cause, supposed that they were the effect of jealousy of his brother for his pet. He, therefore, answered him a little warmly, and told him to attend to his own affairs, and he would do the same.

“Henry, in a rage, with a threatening gesture, struck the cage with his hand. Spinnette, who had been attentively listening to the words of the brother, observed the gesture, and, as he struck the cage, she caused a splinter to fly up and pierce his hand, inflicting another painful wound.

“Henry, like all jealous and unreasonable persons, ascribed his misfortune to the object of his anger; and although the pain from the kick he gave the bird in the morning, and the blow at noon, were owing to nothing but his ill nature, he laid it to the bird, and, enraged beyond measure, he vowed to kill the Greenfinch at the first opportunity.

“He ate his dinner in silence; and all the afternoon, while at work with Oscar and his father, he meditated on the best plan by which he could kill the bird without being found out in his wickedness.

“At last, he concluded to lie awake after he had gone to bed with his brother, and, when all in the house were asleep, he would silently open the cage, and put the cat so that she could easily seize the bird. Accordingly, he ate his supper, and soon crept off to bed; because, as he said, he was to work on the morrow chopping timber for a neighbor, and would have to start early.

“Oscar remained up, attending to and watching the bird for some time; then, bidding his parents good-night, he went to bed, and soon all in the house was quiet, all its inmates but Henry being buried in slumber.

“Now Spinnette was well aware that Henry meditated mischief against her, and she resolved to give him a lesson that would teach him not to cherish feelings of revenge, and that would not be forgotten as long as he lived.

“After waiting until all were asleep, Henry silently crept out of bed, and dressing himself, stole down-stairs and began to search for the cat; in a few moments he found her, and going to the cage, he opened it and thrust her head in.

“Spinnette gave the cat a sharp peck on the nose, which caused her suddenly to withdraw it; Henry, holding her firmly, put her head in again, when Spinnette gave it another peck sharper than the other. The cat began struggling violently, and Henry, beginning to be angry, pulled her ears; she began scratching and biting him at that, and soon his hands and arms were covered with blood.

“Spinnette, during the struggle, quietly slipped out of the cage, and passed out of doors, where she took the form of a gray wolf. After several ineffectual attempts to put the cat’s head again into the cage, Henry let her go, and sat down to think of some other plan by which the bird could be killed, and no blame fall upon him.

“In a moment he thought that he could

drown her in the basin in the cage. He found that there was no water left in the basin, and on searching, found that there was none in the house, — he must go to the spring and get some.

“Although he was seventeen years old, he was something of a coward, for all cruel and revengeful people always are, and he hardly liked to go to the spring alone in the night; but his anger was so great against the bird, that it conquered his fears. So, taking the pail, and going out quietly so as not to awaken his parents, he proceeded to the spring. Spinnette followed behind him in the guise of a great wolf, and when he stooped to get the water, she seized him, with a terrible growl, and carried him off dumb with terror into the wood.

“As she was bearing him along, she called all the elves and fairies to follow her; and, when she had reached the place in the forest known as the ‘Fairies’ Circle,’ she dropped him on the grass, and soon a crowd of singular beings surrounded them.

“There were old men, with immense heads and wide mouths, but with little bodies scarce as high as Henry’s knee. There were curious women, with great glaring eyes like cats’ green eyes; and there were immense grasshoppers with human heads; and great toads that walked on their feet like men; and squirrels, with human hands and feet, and large eyes, like cows’. All these formed into a circle about Spinnette and Henry.

“After all had become quiet, the fairy addressed them as follows: ‘My friends, it is an occurrence of no little importance that has forced me to call you to this meeting. This young man, a son of honest Tobin, the woodchopper, has been guilty of a very wicked and shameful act, and I wish you to pass judgment on him, and say what he deserves for punishment.’

“‘What has he been doing?’ growled an immense toad.

“‘Better eat him first, and hear what he has done afterwards,’ muttered a little, wicked-looking dwarf.

“‘Tell us, Spinnette; we are dying with curiosity,’ said all the old women.

“‘Silence! all, and you shall hear,’ said Spinnette. ‘A poor little Greenfinch, with a broken wing, fell into the hands of this fellow’s brother. He nursed it, took the best of care of it, and in the most generous manner determined to give it its freedom when it was healed; for he considered it wrong to deprive the bird of its liberty longer than it was unable to take care of itself.’

“‘This fellow, having foolishly hurt himself in threatening it, vowed to kill it; and, in the most wicked manner, instigated by the insane jealousy of his disposition, tried to make the cat eat it, thinking that no blame would fall upon him if she did. The bird was your Queen, Spinnette: she, of course, escaped; and, when he went to the spring for water to drown it in, not being successful with the cat, I seized him and brought him here. What in your opinion does he deserve?’

“‘The confusion at the close of this speech was so great, that it was for a few minutes

impossible to hear any single voice. All crowded around Henry, who lay on the grass half dead with fear.

“Spinnette soon commanded silence. When all were again quiet, she said, ‘Since I brought the fellow here, I have thought of a good plan by which he can be well punished. It is this: we will change him into the Greenfinch with the broken wing, put him into the cage, and let him remain in that state until to-morrow night at this time; he will then have suffered sufficiently, without doubt, to cure him of all revengeful thoughts for the future.’

“‘Good! good!’ shouted all the assembly, and Henry was at that instant kicked by one of the huge grasshoppers on the arm. The blow was so great that he felt his limb break, and with the pain and fright he fainted away. When he came from his swoon, he found himself at home, but surrounded by a fence of sticks. His arm pained him exceedingly, and, as he tried to feel of it with his other hand, he discovered that he was covered with feathers, and that his arms were bird’s wings. The

whole truth came upon him, and he remembered that he was to be in that condition until late in the night. Bitterly did he repent of his wicked, revengeful acts, and he vowed from that time, that he would do better, and not hate nor abuse any thing or anybody again.

“But his trials were not yet over. At the break of day, he heard his father and mother coming down-stairs. They looked into his cage, and, finding that the bird was apparently improving, left him to himself while they prepared the breakfast. As soon as it was ready, they called the boys. Oscar soon came down; and, as Henry was not in the house, they supposed that he had gone to his work early, and without waiting for his breakfast, as he often did so.

“At the breakfast, his parents spoke of him, and of the scene about the bird on the day before: and when they both agreed that his disposition was hateful, and unless he conquered it, he would come to some bad end, his feelings may be well imagined; for he heard

the whole conversation, and he the more firmly resolved to turn over a new leaf.

“As soon as breakfast was finished, Tobin went out to sharpen his axe, and Oscar stood by the cage watching the wounded bird for some time; when, noticing that it did not eat, he opened the cage, and took the Greenfinch up carefully; the pain in the broken limb was so great, that when Oscar touched it, Henry fairly screamed, but only as a bird chirps, for he was now only a little Greenfinch.

“Oscar opened the bird’s beak, and, taking a piece of bread that to Henry looked as large as a loaf, but which was really only a fair-sized crumb, forced it down its throat. Henry, half choked, tried not to swallow it, but at last it was forced down by Oscar, who then took the water-basin, and held it to the bird’s beak to let it drink. Henry struggled to get free, but the movement only hurt his broken limb, and did no good, for Oscar held him with a firm yet gentle grasp. The water ran down his throat, and, although he felt little like eating or drinking, he was forced to swallow it or choke.

“Oscar, after holding the bird a while longer, stroking its feathers and nursing its broken wing, giving in so doing a great deal of pain, placed it in its nest and left it by itself, and then accompanied his father to the forest to work.

“Tobin’s wife was busy about the house doing her household work, now in one room, then in another. Soon she went to the garden to get some vegetables, and Henry was left in the house alone. As he lay in the nest reflecting upon his condition, all his misdeeds came back to his memory, one by one, and he wondered how he could have been so bad. We are never so conscious of our wickedness, as when we are suffering in consequence of it.

“His thoughts were interrupted by a stealthy step, and, peering from his nest, he saw the same cat that he had exposed the Greenfinch to, the night before, creeping softly towards him. The cat, although no larger than usual, seemed to his sight to be as big as a lion. His heart sank within him, for, as she approached him, licking her chops, and

purring in the most wicked manner, he knew that he could expect no mercy from her ; for, if she could reach him, he would assuredly be eaten. The cat listened to hear if any person was near, when, finding that all was still, she jumped up on the table on which the cage was placed, and stood beside it, looking with green, hungry eyes at Henry.

“ He, trembling in every limb, tried to call his mother ; but his voice failed him, and all he could do was to shrink into as small a space as possible, and as far from the cat as the bars would permit.

“ Puss, remembering her last night’s biting from the bird, at first cautiously put in her fore-paw, and touched him with it. Henry sprang away with fear, which the cat observing she grew more bold, and, thrusting in her paw less carefully this time, tried to draw him to the side of the cage with her claws. She succeeded in only giving him some severe scratches, for he was able to shake off her claws, although the exertions he made hurt his wounded limb severely. The cat, finding

that she could not secure the bird in this manner, jumped on the top of the cage, when her weight was so great it burst the top in ; at the same time it fell on the floor, the cage, bird, and cat falling together. The noise alarmed Henry's mother, who rushed in just in time to secure the bird from its ruthless enemy.

“ Poor Henry, almost dead with fear and pain, for the water-dish in the cage had fallen across his back and nearly broken it, lay for a few minutes without motion in his mother's hand ; she, thinking him dying, poured a few drops of water down his throat, which revived him somewhat, and she held him carefully until Oscar returned for his father's dinner, he not coming home that day. Oscar fixed up the cage as well as he could, and the bird was once more placed in its nest, and through the remainder of the day was left to himself ; for the cat, having had her ears soundly boxed by Oscar for her attack on the bird, knew enough not to repeat it.

“ At supper-time, Henry had to endure an-

other choking with bread and water, and then was left for the night. Soon after dark the family retired, leaving some food for Henry on his return from his supposed work. Soon all was still in the house, and Henry looked forward to his release from his bird disguise with great impatience.

“While he was awaiting the coming of Spinette to change him to his natural form, he chanced to look to a distant corner of the room, where, beneath a chair, he recognized the green shining eyes of his enemy, the cat. Suddenly they seemed to approach him, and he presently heard her hateful purring near him; he knew that she, with the artfulness of her race, had hidden beneath the chair to await a favorable opportunity to attack him, and he now gave up all hope, for how could he protect himself from her.

“Suddenly the purring ceased, and with a spring she stood beside him. Lifting the door of the cage with one paw, she thrust in the other, and seizing the bird by the wing, she leaped to the floor. As she jumped, the cage

was thrown down, when the cat, alarmed at the noise, darted from the house towards the forest, where she could eat her prey securely. Henry, when he found that he was at last in the power of his enemy, lost his consciousness, the cat bearing him through the wood at a rapid rate. When he recovered his senses, he found himself lying on the grass in the 'Fairies' Circle,' the elves having captured the cat, and restored her victim to his natural form. It was near daybreak when he awoke, and it was some time before he recalled all the events of the past twenty-four hours. As he lay on the grass, endeavoring to collect his thoughts, he heard light footsteps approaching, and soon one of the party of fairies stood before him.

"Looking sternly at him, she said: 'I hope the occurrences of the past day will have a lasting beneficial effect on you. A revengeful, jealous disposition is hateful before all others; you have seen that it carries its own punishment, and that its possessor is disliked and shunned. Conquer it, therefore; and years

hence, when you have become strong in the better traits of your character, and seen that they are appreciated and admired, you will, I hope, be thankful for the lesson taught by Spinnette. As to your brother, I shall take his fortunes under my charge, and he shall be one of the greatest in the land, and if I find that you conquer your bad instincts and are worthy of my friendly help, your efforts shall be rewarded." With these words the fairy disappeared, leaving Henry alone, who was now resolved on doing well.

"Soon the gray light of daybreak, glimmering through the foliage of the trees, and the shrill crowing of the cocks at the distant cottage, admonished him that it was time for him to return home. On entering the house, he found his parents and Oscar mourning at the supposed capture of the bird by the cat, the empty cage having been found on the floor. He informed them of his adventures, but it was long before he could make them believe that the Greenfinch of the day before and himself were the same; and it was only

on repeating the conversation of his parents at the dinner-table that he could really convince them. On repeating the admonitions of Spinnette, he assured them that the lesson he had received should not be thrown away ; and that hereafter he would be worthy of their affection and respect. And he kept his word ; and in years after, when Spinnette, who had already advanced Oscar to one of the highest positions in the land, found that he really was all that she could wish, she took his fortunes under her charge, and he was soon placed in a post of great honor and distinction."

Having answered the many inquiries that this little story naturally suggested, Grosbeak, who had towards its close been somewhat nervous and hurried, said to his listeners : "I must now leave you for the north. I would like to remain here longer ; but if I hurry now in my flight, I can undoubtedly overtake my friends that have already gone. I will bid you good-by then, and I hope that we

may all meet again before another year's seasons have passed over our heads. I know I shall see you, Wrens and Pine Finches, during the summer, for we shall probably nest in the same neighborhood, and as for you, Chick-a-dees, why, if we don't see each other before next winter, we shall then, and will be all the more glad at the meeting. Good-by, then, all of you, and take care of yourselves." So saying, he flew away in a northerly direction, the other birds wishing him "a pleasant journey, and good luck," until he was out of hearing. As it was now about noon, the party, in the best of humor at knowing that the birds were appreciated and liked by some of the humans, separated into little groups and wandered about the swamp and adjacent woods, leaving the Woodcocks by themselves. They, like other folks similarly situated, found enough to talk about, if of nothing else than the many virtues and good qualities of the "dear departed;" and before they were aware, they were joined by the Chicks and Wrens, who were on their way to their roosting-places in the cedars, for it was

now late in the afternoon. They had hardly arrived when the party was joined by the Crossbill that Grosbeak spoke of in the morning. After giving him the warmest of welcomes, they begged he would give an account of his imprisonment and escape, and, glad to please them, he soon commenced.

CHAPTER VI.

“THE story that I am about to tell you,” began Crossbill, “is of so strange a nature, that I have no doubt but you will think, before I am half through with it, that I am drawing extensively on my imagination ; but I mean to narrate the simple truth. You remember when I was captured, that the weather was excessively cold. Well, I was carried in a small box, that had an aperture in the top, for several miles, and the cold air coming in upon me, and my cramped position that I was forced to take, produced upon me such an effect that, when I was taken from my confinement and placed in a large cage, I could not, for a long

time, control my movements, but was obliged to remain sitting flat on the bottom of my cage, my eyes closed with dizziness, my whole senses in a sort of stupor. I have since thought that the latter effect was produced by my being suddenly changed from a very cold atmosphere, which is to me, of course, the most natural one, into a very warm one ; for the room in which my cage was placed was kept exceedingly warm to keep the plants and birds in good health."

"Birds !" exclaimed some of his hearers ; "were there other birds, then, kept in imprisonment?"

"There were, I am sorry to say," replied Crossbill, "a great number ; and the room in which we were kept was called an *aviary*, as I afterwards discovered.



Crossbill.

“As soon as I became accustomed to the warm atmosphere, and could control myself, I mounted upon the horizontal bar across the cage, and took a survey of my surroundings; and I must confess I was almost powerless with astonishment, and I am not ashamed to say it, dismay. For the walls of the room were covered with cages and creeping plants, and in different places were placed glass boxes, containing water, in which were growing the plants that we see in our ponds and streams; there were also swimming, full of life and apparent contentment, some of our most familiar fishes. I said I was dismayed, but it was not at seeing these things, but at observing some of the birds that were standing in the sunlight trimming their feathers. They were of the most brilliant plumage conceivable, had green heads, red bodies, and long green and blue and red tails.

“Oh, what handsome birds they must have been!” exclaimed young Miss Chick-a-dée, giving a sort of half-dissatisfied look at her attendant swain, who was, as we well know, clad in a very sober dress indeed. He

looked at himself half ashamed ; for your young masculine always desires to appear well in the eyes of his fair one.

“ Handsome ! yes, I think so,” replied Crossbill, in a half-sneering tone. “ I doubt any of you would have thought them very handsome, if you had seen their immense hooked beaks, and white malicious eyes, and heard them, as I did, swear the most fearful oaths.”

“ Swear ? do you think we will credit such an abominable libel on our whole tribe as that ? Birds swear, indeed ! ”

Such were the indignant exclamations that rang about the ears of Crossbill. His hearers certainly thought he was drawing the long bow, for all well-regulated birds take great pride in their abstinence from profanity.

“ Please let me tell my story, and keep your comments to yourselves until I am done,” replied Crossbill quietly, “ for I have told you the truth. I did hear those gaudily plumaged wretches use the most profane oaths, and you cannot wonder at my horror.

“ They seemed to have been all christened

by some old maid, whose name was 'Polly ;' for in the midst of their profanity they would exclaim, 'Oh, pretty Polly, pretty Polly ! Will Polly have a cracker ?' and then they would open their huge mouths, and show their black, hard tongues. Never, so long as I live, shall I forget those demons ; for they were nothing else. Then there were some birds, noisy wretches they were, clad in sober gray apparel, who had the most remarkable faculty for imitating the songs of other birds that I ever heard of.

"All day long would they stand on their perches and sing. Sometimes they would caw like a crow, then scream like a hawk, then like an owl. Sometimes their song was like a sparrow ; then like old Chick-a-dee's here."

"Like mine ?" interrupted Chick. "Oh ! *now* we have caught you in a fib ; for I never saw such birds, and they couldn't of course learn my song." Here he glanced in triumph at Crossbill.

"I can't help that," responded the other in a similar manner ; "but it is a fact. I can't,

for the life of me, think where such birds could have come from, for I never met with them before."

"I think I can throw a little light on this matter," quietly remarked Woodcock, who had been listening with great attention to Crossbill's story. "I have seen a great many of those birds in the Southern States, where, from their habits of mimicking, they are called 'mocking-birds.' You have described them very well, Mr. Crossbill."

Such corroboration of the story of Crossbill was not to be gainsaid, and the listeners became more attentive to the story they were hearing than ever.

"In addition to the birds that I have already referred to," resumed Crossbill, "there were others clad in the most gorgeous yellow. They were of the size of a sparrow, and resembled that bird in general appearance. They were equally noisy with the rest, and between them all my head came near splitting.

"Well, I kept pretty quiet for a day or two,

for I was, as I before remarked, afraid of the huge-mouthed, swearing birds. But I soon found they could not reach me, as they were confined to their perches by small chains that were fastened to their feet.

“I will say that I was treated by the people of that house in the most kind manner: every day did I have an abundant supply of seeds put in my cage, and a nice large dish of fresh water.

“But in a month or two I was given to a person who was called by many of his friends a naturalist, — a natural would be his more proper title, — and what I suffered while I was in his possession, no mortal tongue can tell. He kept me hung in a room, in which he had great glass bottles containing numerous venomous snakes, and in glass cases all around the room were hundreds of our old friends and acquaintances, stuffed in a manner similar to their natural shape, and with glass eyes put in their heads. I can conceive of no more horrid prison house than that was.

“For many months did I suffer from the

ill-treatment of that man. He seemed determined to try all the most hateful and cruel experiments upon me possible, and gave me all manner of unnatural food, to see which I preferred, and how much of each I would eat in a day. Put me in the cage with jays and other quarrelsome and ferocious birds to see if I had a spirit of my own. Gave me filthy drugs, to ascertain if he could procure a change of the color of my plumage; and tried upon me the effect of various preparations made for the purpose of getting one to sleep. One day he placed in my cage a sponge filled with a liquid, that, as fast as it was evaporated, gave me a deadly faintness, until, at last, I fell to the floor of my cage senseless. All these things did he practise upon me, and I suffered all that any one bird could suffer. But a day of deliverance arrived."

"Oh, I am so glad!" compassionately yet joyfully exclaimed old Mrs. Chick, who had been listening with the greatest attention to the story. "Poor fellow! how much we pity you!"

“Yes, my day of delivery at length arrived,” resumed Crossbill, rewarding Mrs. Chick with a glance of gratitude for her sympathy. “It was on the evening of day before yesterday, that my master, I suppose I must call him such, took me in my cage to a meeting of what is called the Society of Naturalists. The members were assembled, when I arrived, in a large and comfortable room, and were busy in the midst of a discussion on the relative strength of liquids. My master placed me in my cage on a long table that was in the room, and listened to the discussion. Some of the members took the ground that water possessed the greatest strength, and illustrated their arguments by bringing forward the fact, that, if it were not for the strength of water, the mills and factories, that are so abundant in the whole country, could not, for a moment, be in motion. Others—I think they said they came from Taunton—disclaimed against the strength of water, saying that, so far as their experience extended, it was a very weak preparation, giving at the same time their belief that whiskey

was of a greater power, and gave their personal observations of a single glass, in many instances, knocking a man down,—a fact never yet put upon record with relation to water. A compromise was at length effected between the two factions, and, by general consent, a mixture of the two liquids was considered best for all practical purposes.

“When this very important question was settled to the satisfaction of all parties, the attention of the meeting was directed to my master, who arose coolly from his seat, and remarked that he had brought for the inspection of the society a fine specimen of the Crossbill, and he would like to have the members give their attention for a moment to the phenomenon of its peculiar bill. He then gave the most absurd explanation of my habits and food, and, after ventilating some of the most outrageous doctrines, concluded by saying, ‘And now, gentlemen, having given my views on this extraordinary malformation, I should like to have yours; not, of course, believing that you can advance any thing that will affect

my arguments, but because I shall be able to get corroboration from you in various ways.' It will be noticed that he was afflicted with a true naturalist's modesty.

"As soon as he had finished, the theme was taken up by various members, some ascribing the form of my bill to the various crosses that my family had had in former times with others. Some concluding that the malformation, as they termed it, was inherited from the first pair that was created, and was the result of a little deception that existed between them, they having played a little game of cross purposes together. Some brought forward one argument, some another, all full of absurdity; at length there arose a gentleman, with an 'I shall now crush you all' air about him, who addressed the others politely as follows: 'You are all wrong, you may be assured; if you had paid that attention to embryology that the importance of the subject should receive, you would know that, owing to the peculiar character of the food of some birds, the shell of the eggs is of greater hardness and toughness

than that of others. Now it is the case with this species, and you can readily see, that as the young bird, imprisoned in its flinty covering, is making frantic efforts to escape, its young and tender bill becomes bent, and before the chick is hatched, it has actually retained its present form. I might give you an elaborate analysis of the reason for its becoming hard at once, but I think such is unnecessary.' He then sat down, in the midst of an admiring audience.

"'But, sir,' suggested a pale and sickly-looking student, 'might not nature have intended this bird's bill to be of this form, that its peculiar food — the seeds of pines — could be opened with the greater facility?'

"'Pooh! you know nothing about nature,' quickly and politely answered the other, who could not appreciate this rational explanation of my form. 'If you look deeper into the great secrets that she conceals, you will appreciate this fact. But I see I must show you. I will take the bird, and cut off its head, and, by a dissection of the muscles that move it,

will show you that the peculiar crossing of the beak is the result of unnatural pressure.'

"You may judge, my friends, when I heard this man so coolly talk of cutting off my head, that I felt far from comfortable. I had noticed that the upper part of one of the windows of the room was open for the sake of ventilation, and I inwardly resolved that if a chance offered, I would make an effort to escape. So when this man opened my cage, and offered to take me out, I seized his finger between my bill, and gave it a bite with all my strength. Dropping me in his pain, he forgot to close the door of the cage. In one jump I rushed through it, flew out of the window, and was free. I flew about the country until I met Grosbeak, and here I am."

His auditors who had been wrapped in attention, now crowded around him, and the congratulations they gave him were of the warmest nature. As it was now twilight, they all wished the Woodcocks good night, and, taking Crossbill with them, they repaired to their roost in the cedars.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning opened with a beautiful sunrise, the purple and golden clouds in the east giving the whole atmosphere a rosy tint. There had been a light frost in the night, but it was only sufficiently cold to remind the denizens of the woods, when they awoke, that this was the first day of March, and that summer had not yet quite arrived.

Reader, did you ever sleep in the woods, the earth covered with a few pine or hemlock boughs for your bed, and your single blanket for your only coverlet? Of course you have; every one has, who bears a genuine love for nature within his heart. But did you ever sleep there, when, as you awoke, you found your blanket covered with a coating of frost; your ears, or rather that one which was left uncovered through the night, for the purpose of hearing the approach of wild animals, tingling with the mischievous kiss of Jack Frost?

If you have not, make it among your experiences as soon as possible. If you have, you doubtless remember what a satisfaction it was to quietly creep out from beneath your blanket, in order that you might not arouse your companions ; get together some dry wood, and put a huge pile of it on the smouldering embers of last night's camp-fire, and, as soon as a glorious blaze rewarded your efforts, wasn't it the jolliest of jollinesses to give an Indian whoop as loud as the whole tribe of Apaches and Cheyennes could make together, to arouse your sleeping comrades, and show them what a splendid hunting or fishing morning it was ? And wasn't it a satisfaction to see them throw off their blankets, and arise to their feet, beating their arms against their sides to recover a quick and glowing circulation, and then group by the side of the fire exclaiming, " Whew, what a frost ! you are a trump, old fellow, always with a good fire to warm one by ! "

Now old Mr. Chick-a-dee had no fire to call his companions to ; but when he awoke, and found what a pleasant morning it was not-

withstanding the frost, he aroused his companions, who awoke in an instant, — for one always does who sleeps in the woods, — and they congratulated one another on the beauty of the weather, and the many signs that were manifest of a continuation of it.

“Yes, friends,” remarked old Chick to his companions, who were busily employed picking up their breakfast, “there is no doubt we shall have an early spring, for all the birds coming from the south declare that the season is at least a month earlier than usual. Why! as I awoke last night, if you will believe me, I heard a flock of geese flying overhead, steering for the north; and you all know they are perfectly well acquainted with the signs of the times, and would not venture from their southern homes without a good reason.”

“That they would not,” remarked Crossbill, who was busy in opening some of the seeds of the pines, “your sensible goose rarely makes a mistake, and I am thinking I must be going north myself soon, if I would meet my friends; for, as the weather is so fine, they will be soon

moving for their nesting-places, and I shall have trouble to find them. You know we Crossbills are early nesters."

"Yes," replied one of the Wrens, "and we have often wondered why you always nested and reared your young in so uncomfortable a part of the year, when you might wait until it was more pleasant and warm."

"Why, don't you see that we are the same as all birds," answered Crossbill, "directed by the force of nature to have our young just when there is an abundance of food to rear them on? You Chicks and Wrens do not have your young ones hatched until there are great numbers of caterpillars and grubs and worms for their food, for such are necessary to them. The Owls and Hawks have theirs earlier, when there is the greatest number of rabbits and rats to give them, before the foliage of the trees and shrubs is so dense that they cannot readily see their prey. But we Crossbills are obliged to get our children brought up, and able to fly, before our food, the seeds of pines and other evergreens, is exhausted. Why, bless your

souls! we are sometimes forced to wander dozens of miles for a meal, after the month of May, and what would our chicks do then?"

"I never thought of all these things," exclaimed the Wren who had spoken before. "We Wrens have such an abundance of food through the whole spring and summer, that we can rear our young ones when we please. Did you ever think of this matter before, Chick?" he asked, addressing our old friend, who was trying to knock off a piece of dead bark, that he might secure a grub that was evidently beneath it.

"Oh, yes!" replied Chick, pausing for a minute in his labors, "my attention was called to it in a rather singular manner. I had often wondered at the shiftlessness of some birds in waiting until the summer was far advanced, before they reared their young; but when I looked into the matter, I found they were wiser than I."

"How was it? tell us about it," exclaimed several of the others, who had just finished

their breakfast, and were pluming their feathers in the warm sun.

“Wait a bit,” said Chick, hammering at the bark, “and I’ll tell you.”

After a few vigorous blows at the lurking-place of the grub, the bark fell off, and the luscious morsel was exposed to view ; seizing and giving it a sharp peck or two, Chick swallowed his prize, and then resumed his remarks.

“It was in the month of July, two years ago,” he began, “that Mrs. Chick and I, having reared a family of eight little Chicks, and advanced them to the period of independence, feeling that some little recreation and change of scene would be of benefit to both of us, concluded to take a trip to regions unknown to us. So one morning, bright and early, we started. Travelling eastward by easy stages, we arrived late in the afternoon at a grove of cedars that stood on a long stretch of sandy beach. Mrs. Chick, who was very thirsty, flew down to the beach for a drink of the water that stretched out as far as we could see before us. One

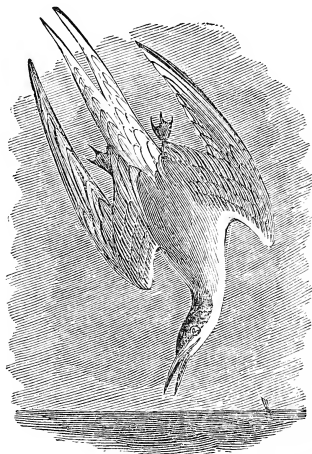
swallow she took, when the dear soul, making up a horrible face, declared the water was unfit to drink ; it tasted horribly. Neither of us before that had ever heard of the ocean, and we could not account for its salt taste. Fortunately we found a spring that ran from a hillside near by and we took a long and grateful draught.

“ We then went to rest in the grove, and remained there until the next morning.

“ As soon as it was light, we resumed our journey, and a pleasant trip we had of it ; following down the coast for a day or two, we arrived at length at a point that seemed a sort of end to the main land. Out in the water, we noticed a number of islands, and we concluded to explore them, which we did. We found that they were inhabited by a curious race of birds, different from any we are accustomed to see in the woods ; they were of a beautiful bluish gray on their backs, and of a pure white beneath their bodies ; their heads were black, and their bills and feet and legs were of a delicate reddish pink.”

“Oh, what handsome birds they must have been!” exclaimed one of the ardent young female Chick-a-dees.

“They had long, pointed wings,” continued Chick, without noticing the interruption, “and when they flew, they darted about in different directions like the Swallows. In fact, the people on the coast, as I have since learned, call them Sea Swallows, and they are often called Terns.



THE TERN.

“Well, we looked over the islands, and not

a tree or shrub did we see on them, nothing but sand and little clumps of tall, coarse grass. Now I come to the matter of the young birds and their food, that I started this account for. All over the island there were little hollows, scratched in the sand by the birds, in which were arranged loosely a few straws and seaweed, and in which were laid three or four eggs. Mind you, this was at the middle of July, and I wondered at their eggs being laid so late. But I soon observed that the birds left the eggs all through the day, to be hatched by the heat of the sun."

"The heat of the sun?" exclaimed one of the female members of the group. "Oh, what shiftless wretches!" There was a look of disgust on her countenance which was reflected by the faces of the others, in a manner not to be mistaken.

"Not so shiftless as you think," answered Chick, "for it was a valuable help to them. You must remember that those birds feed entirely upon small fishes, which they dive down upon, while on the wing, and seize in their

bills in the water. Now, these fishes are not always to be obtained, and a supply of food depends very much upon the elements; besides, the sand, as you all know, retains a great deal of heat; the sun, shining down upon it, warms it thoroughly, and the eggs laid upon it are kept as warm as if their parent were sitting upon them.

“But I have not shown why the eggs were laid so late, for, if the birds by instinct depend upon the sun to hatch them, why not lay them in June, for the sun of that month is as warm as that of any other part of the season.

“The reason is this, the young of these Terns, or Sea Swallows, are fed entirely upon small fishes; young fishes that are hatched and grown during the spring and early summer.

“Now if the eggs had been laid, and the chicks hatched earlier than their food was ready, what would they have to support them? Nothing; they would starve, just as our young ones would, if the caterpillars and worms and insects should die all at once.

“It was noticing the Sea Swallows, and

their way of feeding their young, that first called my attention to this important fact."

"Oh, some of the young Terns were hatched then!" exclaimed one of his listeners.

"Yes," replied Chick, "a few of them were; and they sat on the sand, looking like bunches of downy cotton, patiently awaiting their parents' return with food, and it was an interesting sight, I assure you; the Terns would fly over the water, at the height of these cedars perhaps, watching the small fishes swimming beneath. As soon as one came near the surface, down pounced the bird upon it, and rarely indeed did it miss its aim; then, taking the little fish to the island, the Tern dropped it into the mouth of its young, as she flew over it. Yes: there are many things we birds, who live in the woods, know nothing of."

"Even the naturalists, who discuss the strength of water, don't know all," remarked Crossbill, with a grim smile of irony. "But it is getting into the forenoon, and, if I expect to reach my friends, I must leave you."

"Stop a moment," exclaimed Chick; "I

have been thinking that a few companions will not be distasteful to you, and as none of us Chick-a-dees expect to nest before May, and you Wrens will be going north soon, what do you all say to our going together with Crossbill, leaving him with his friends, and parting from each other when it is time for us to return to our home in the swamp, and begin our nests."

"Agreed," exclaimed the other Chicks, who were delighted at a chance to see a little of the world themselves.

"We will go together, that is, if the Wrens and Crossbill want us."

"Of course we do," exclaimed the others, "we shall be only too glad of your company."

All now was bustle and busy preparation: and in a few minutes all the birds were ready for their northern trip, for they had no trunks and portmanteaus to pack, thirteen or more, like some of our Saratoga or Newport belles.

"But we must bid good-by to old Woodcock," suggested one of the Wrens, "we can't leave him without that attention."

“True,” said Chick, “and we will visit him at once.” At these words, the whole party flew to the spring in the swamp, where they left Woodcock and the widow, the evening before. They found them apparently on the best of terms with each other.

“And so you are going on a trip north?” said Woodcock, when they had told him their determination. “Well, I wish you a pleasant journey, and a happy return. As for this good soul,” said he, regarding the widow W. with admiration, “she has consented to unite her lot with mine, and, when you return, you will doubtless find us with four little Woodcocks” —

“Oh! Mr. W., how can you?” expostulated the widow, blushing to the eyes, and trembling with bashful emotion.

“Well, good-by, both of you,” said Chick, noticing her embarrassment, and trying to relieve it. “We must be off: take good care of yourselves, and give our regards to neighbor Grouse.”

“Good-by,” said Woodcock, and exchan-

ging good wishes and kind farewells, the whole party flew out of the swamp, and began their Northern trip.

We will not follow them in this excursion ; suffice it to say that in the strange lands they visited, and the new scenes and incidents that passed before them, they found an almost endless fund of entertainment and instruction ; and, when the Chick-a-dees parted from the Wrens and Crossbills, and returned to their summer homes, the accounts they gave their many friends were in the highest degree interesting and instructive. So much so, in fact, that it is a very common thing now-a-days for many of the birds that we have had meetings with in the preceding pages, to visit the north and see for themselves the wonderful things they had heard about in Chick-a-dee's and his family's narrations.

THE SCARLET TANAGER.

WE often hear, in the deep woods of New England, the song of a bird so peculiar and attractive, that we make an effort to become acquainted with the singer. We follow the notes through the trees, as their author retreats before us, until, at length, cautiously drawing near, we discover him perched on a high branch, his wings drooping, his tail expanded, and crest erected, in the very act of singing. We notice that the song is similar to that of the American robin, but that it is much sweeter, and has the property of ventriloquism: so that, while the bird is immediately above us, his song will often sound as if he were many rods away.

When we say that this bird is of a beautiful scarlet plumage on the head, neck, and body, and that his wings and tail are pure, unspotted

black, most of my young readers will doubtless recognize the Scarlet Tanager. While we



THE SCARLET TANAGER.

watch the gaudily dressed little fellow, he is joined by another bird, that, at the first glance, we should certainly suppose to be of another species; for it is of a plain greenish plumage, and it has none of the beautiful notes of the

other, and, save an occasional "*chip-chirr*" which it utters in a listless tone, is altogether a quiet, unobtrusive bird. But, when we see the Tanager welcome the new-comer with warm caresses and loudly repeated songs, we conclude at once that it is his mate; and we are right. Soon the pair, with affectionate twitterings and caresses, flit away through the foliage; and we do not follow them farther, for our attention is attracted by the song or movements of some other of our feathered acquaintances of the woods.

The Scarlet Tanager arrives here in its northern migrations about the twenty-fifth of May, the males usually preceding the females a few days. It is rarely seen away from its favorite oak-groves, where it is usually busy, through the day, in searching for various insects, of which its food principally consists. Early in June, after mating, both birds begin to prepare their nest; this is almost always placed on a fork of a horizontal branch of a tree, about twenty feet from the ground, usually in the deep woods. It is constructed of fine

branching twigs, but loosely arranged together, and, if it were not for the interlocking of the twigs, it would soon fall apart. It is slightly hollowed, and is lined with finer twigs and the leaves of pines and hemlocks. During the preparation of the nest, the Scarlet Tanager is as industrious as his mate, and, besides helping her, cheers her toils with many a merry song.

As soon as the fabric is completed, the female lays four or five eggs, which are of a delicate greenish-blue color, and covered with spots and blotches of purple and red, thickest at their greater end. The eggs laid, incubation commences; and here the Tanager does not shirk his share of the labor, for he takes his place on the eggs, and permits his mate to have a chance for recreation and exercise whenever she wishes. When she is sitting, he is perched near her, cheering her with his song, or hunting some little titbit of food that he knows will be especially grateful to her. Altogether he is "a model husband," and a good example to his neighbors, who, we are sorry to say, do not always improve by him.

As soon as the young Tanagers are hatched, which happens in about twelve days from the time incubation is commenced, all is activity and bustle with the parents; for so many more mouths are to be fed, and they must have nothing but the most delicate food. So Tanager and his wife are busy from morning until night in procuring nice tender caterpillars and spiders for them, and have but few chances for recreation for themselves.

In about four weeks from their birth, the young Tanagers, having put on a beautifully mottled dress of green and reddish, like a mixture of that of their parents, and having become well-grown birds, almost as large as their father and mother, leave the nest, and follow their parents about, learning from them how to recognize and obtain the different kinds of food, and getting from them a little idea of the phenomena of the seasons, that they may safely perform the migration, in the fall, that all Tanagers are in the habit of making. Having learned these things, they are politely informed by their parents, that, having had

the trouble of bringing them up thus far, they do not think it fair that they should have further care with them, and that, during the remainder of their stay, they had better live by themselves. The young birds, taking the hint, soon leave their parents, who, with this care off their minds, have nothing to do but enjoy themselves. This they do, wandering in the groves and forests, singing and listening to the songs of their friends and neighbors, and living on the abundance that kind Nature has provided for them. Early in September, when the nights grow cool, they begin to move in their southern flight; and soon they arrive at their beautiful home in the tropics, where they are joined by their young ones and friends, and where they pass the winter in the enjoyment of the comforts and luxuries that in such scenes abound.

THE TOWHEE BUNTINGS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS, THE BOBOLINKS.

CHAPTER I.

IN our rambles in the country, we discover a gently-sloping hill facing to the south; crowning it, and extending down a part of its sides, a thick grove of pines and cedars; scattered over the remainder of its surface, little clumps of birches and maples, between which are growing thickets of whortleberry bushes, or smiling little patches of green grass bespangled and flecked with the beautiful and sweet-scented flowers that are so abundant in our forests in the earlier part of June. At the base of the hill is a short stretch of meadow, through which romps and prattles a merry little brook, that has left its home in the cool springs in the hills away off, and is now on a voyage of discovery and adventure to the mill-stream below the woods.

Away in the distance, smiling fields of young and tender grain, or brown, ploughed patches of land are visible, in which busy farmers are planting seed, or tending newly-sprouted plants. We cross the little meadow, stoop, and dip from a deep eddy in the brook that is shaded by overhanging brakes and reeds, some of the cold, sparkling water in a piece of birch-bark that we find on the banks of the stream, and, refreshed by the grateful draught, begin to ascend the hill.

We have hardly left the meadow, and are passing a thicket of blackberry bushes, when we notice, flitting through them, a small bird, greenish-olive colored on its back and lighter beneath, almost white on the abdomen, which constantly utters the notes "chip-chip-che wēo;" which being interpreted means "Whom have we here?" "What do you want?"

We pause to observe its movements, when it quickly retires; for the White-eyed Vireo, as it is called, is of a modest disposition, and dislikes to be watched. We move on, and discover our old friends, the Cat Birds, busily

engaged in building their houses in one of the barberry clumps; the Robins just finishing theirs in one of the birches; the Yellow Throats just beginning theirs in a clump of the whortleberry bushes, and the Yellow Warblers looking about for a suitable location for theirs.

We pause for a moment to watch these different stages of housekeeping, when we hear a rustling among the dead leaves on the ground near us, and, turning to it, we perceive our other old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Towhee Bunting; the former clad in a new and shiny suit of black coat, and brown and white waistcoat, and Mrs. Towhee in a sober brownish dress, with a white and drab apron, neat and pretty. They salute us with a cheerful "Towhee," which means "Good-morning," and disappear in the undergrowth.

We turn to our ascent of the hill, and soon enter the pine-woods, where we notice that the Golden-crowned Thrushes and Black-throated Green Warblers have established themselves; and, as we pass through a densely shaded spot,

we discover the Night Hawks sitting on a fallen trunk of a tree, discussing with great earnestness their plans for the future.

Continuing our rambles, we find that all our bird acquaintances have returned from the south, and are seeking for desirable dwelling-places ; and we return home, right glad to have met so many old friends in a half-day's walk.

It was after such visitors had left just such a scene, at precisely the same time in the early summer, and had met just such old acquaintances, that the incidents we are about to relate transpired. The Vireo continued a scrap of song that the visitors had interrupted ; the Cat Birds, Robins, and Yellow Throats resumed their labors, and the Golden-crowned Thrushes flew down to the clump of bushes where the Towhees were, to have a few moments' chat with them.

"And they tell me," said Mrs. Golden Crown, after the usual courtesies were passed, "that that giddy fellow, Bobolink, has really married, and is about to settle in the meadow, below, for the summer."

“Indeed!” answered Mrs. Towhee, who was pluming and arranging her feathers, for, although long since married, she was careful to keep her dress neat and orderly; “I don’t know how we shall get along with him, for he is such a rattle-brain, such a noisy fellow, that he is enough to, sometimes, drive one distracted. I must say, being quiet and stay-at-home-inclined myself, that I am sorry he has come into the neighborhood.”

The old lady moved about nervously, and her countenance wore altogether a dissatisfied expression.

“So am I,” observed Mrs. Golden Crown, “if for nothing more than his habit of visiting the fields of newly-sown grain, and thus bringing our whole neighborhood into ill repute with the farmers.”

“But whom has he married?” inquired Mr. Towhee, who had been quietly listening to the conversation.

“Oh, a cousin of his, that quiet, little thing, with the faded yellow and spotted dress, who was raised down by the mill two years ago.

But, my dear Mrs. Towhee, how well you are looking! It seems to me that, notwithstanding all your family cares and labors, you are never growing old. And you, Mr. Towhee, must be a very attentive husband, to have your wife always with such a cheerful face and amiable disposition."

"Ah, my friend Thrush!" answered Towhee, "we old people have seen enough of real life to know that it is only the courtesies and kindnesses in the domestic circle that create real happiness, and we cannot afford to neglect them. We should not dare to waste our time away from home, chatting and rollicking like Bobolink, who, until his family are all hatched and his poor wife is unable to provide for them, does nothing but gad about and sing for the amusement or worriment of others."

"That's true, Mr. Towhee," said Mrs. Golden Crown; "and how much happier would be some of our neighbors if their husbands would take pattern by you! Now there are the Ruffed Grouse up here in the woods; really, they act shamefully. Just as soon as

their wives have laid their eggs, the 'lords and masters' leave them, and go off together in the woods, where they do nothing but enjoy themselves, and do not join their ladies until the young ones are grown and able to provide for themselves; not one moment's care do they have, but they leave all the responsibility of the family to their mates. Such scandalous conduct is almost enough to make one ashamed of being a bird."

Here the little lady gave her wings an indignant flutter. Mrs. Towhee said nothing, but the look she gave her friend was full of applause.

"And those gaudy fellows, the Summer Ducks," continued Mrs. Golden Crown, who, when she began, like all the ladies, loved to dwell upon the imperfections of the opposite sex, "how little care do they give themselves about their families! I have often pitied that poor female, who had her nest in the old stump by the mill-pond, and tried to get her to rebel; but she didn't have the courage, but took her husband's neglect as a matter of course, and

let him do nothing but enjoy himself. Bah! it's enough to disgust one."

Here her husband, thinking it inadvisable to have her get further excited, turned to Mrs. Towhee, and asked her when she intended beginning her nest.

"To-morrow," was the reply; "we have chosen a comfortable spot in the thicket here, where we will be well surrounded by bushes; and we hope you will be our near neighbors, for we have always got along well together, and I know of no one that I would prefer."

"Thank you for your good opinion," answered Golden Crown; "we have pitched upon a little hillock above here, where we can dig in and build our nest so that it will be almost entirely protected from the rains; so we will be neighbors, and, no doubt, the best of friends. But we must be going now, for we have one or two calls to make, and then we intend making preparations for commencing our nest. Good-day, Mrs. Towhee; you must give us a call soon; and you, Towhee, be neighborly, and look in on us when it is convenient."

After the usual exchange of compliments, the Golden Crowns flew away, and Towhee and his wife entered the thicket, where they passed the remainder of the day in those little innocent pastimes that only well-behaved and well-regulated birds know any thing about.



CHAPTER II.

AFTER leaving the Towhees, the Golden Crowns paid a few flying visits to some of their most intimate neighbors, exchanging a pleasant "good-day" with one, making some friendly inquiry or suggestion to another, or sympathizing with another in some trouble or affliction; for the birds have their trials and troubles as well as we humans, and they sympathize with and help each other more and better, I am afraid, than we.

At length the Golden Crowns arrived at the nest of the Swamp Blackbirds, and, as it hap-

pened to be early in the forenoon, both of them were at home.

“Good-morning, my dear Mr. and Mrs. Blackbird,” was the hearty salutation with which they approached them. “And you really have concluded to remain in our neighborhood this summer. We heard you were building your nest some time ago, but this is the first opportunity we have had of giving you a call.”

“We are delighted to see you,” answered Mr. Blackbird, “and you are just in time to congratulate my wife upon laying her complement of five eggs. See how beautiful they are!”

Here he conducted his visitors to the nest, and permitted them to inspect its contents.

“How very pretty!” exclaimed Mrs. Thrush, “pale blue, with spots and blotches and curiously waving lines of black and brown.”

“Really, my dear Mrs. Blackbird,” added Mr. Golden Crown, “your success must be very encouraging, and we trust that you will be equally fortunate in rearing an interesting

group of chicks from them. By the way, we understand that Bobolink has concluded to settle near us in this same meadow: how do you like it?"

"Oh, very well!" replied Blackbird; "he is a distant relative of mine, and, although he is apt to be a little flighty and uncertain, we can't say that we dislike him: do we, wife?"

"No, indeed!" answered Mrs. Blackbird. "Bob is a favorite of mine; he is such a witty, lively body."

"Yes; but I shouldn't want to incur his displeasure," added her husband, "for he is terribly sharp, and has the habit of saying disagreeable things."

"Well," said Mrs. Golden Crown, who, although a well-meaning body, was not very discreet, and was a little apt to repeat things said to her in private, "his residing here will be very disagreeable to one family this season, at least, and they are near neighbors of ours, and ones we like, too. I refer to the Towhees; we were just there, and had a long conversation about the Bobolinks with them, and both

Mr. and Mrs. Towhee expressed themselves sorry that he is to live here."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Blackbird, somewhat warmly.

"Oh, well, dear!" interrupted Mr. Thrush, endeavoring to smooth over the Towhees' observations, for he knew that what was said would be repeated to the Bobolinks; "their remarks were only general, and hardly amounted to more than a condemnation of his habit of talking and gossip."

"Why, Mr. Thrush, how can you say so?" quickly replied his mate, not noticing the glance of warning that he gave her. "Surely they gave him one of the worst of characters; said he was a noisy rattle-brain; enough to drive one distracted; away from home chattering and rollicking, and that he does nothing but gad about, and sing for the amusement or worriment of others. Didn't they say all these things, and do you call that nothing? As for my part, I haven't the least doubt in the world but that Bobolink will be very disagreeable indeed to the Towhees."

“Oh, well,” somewhat sneeringly answered Mrs. Blackbird, “I guess he can get along without their friendship. And I don’t think there will be much love lost between them. I mean to tell him what a fine opinion his neighbors have regarding him, and show him how his character is being pulled to pieces by all the old gossips in the neighborhood.”

Here she indignantly ruffled her feathers, and her countenance wore a sulky, disdainful look.

“Old gossips, indeed!” warmly replied Mrs. Thrush. “I would have you know that I am no more an old gossip than yourself; and as for the Towhees, I really pity them in being obliged to have such neighbors.”

If Mr. Golden Crown had not here interrupted his mate, and gently forced her from the scene, there is no telling how far her enthusiasm for her friend would have carried her. After they had passed from the hearing of the Blackbirds, he remonstrated with her for repeating what had been said by the Towhees; but she did not yet see her error, and

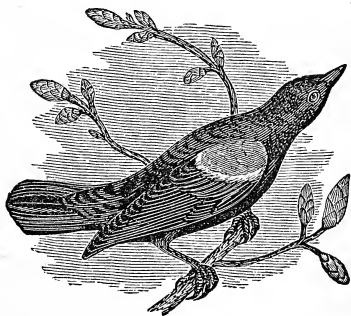
was, moreover, a little unamiable with her husband for "having prevented her from freeing her mind," as she expressed it.

As soon as their visitors had left them, the Blackbirds flew to the place where Bobolink and his mate were just beginning their nest. As they approached, they heard his voice rattling forth to the whole neighborhood a long story of how he had wandered in the rice-fields of the south, and such nice flirtations as he had with the beautiful female Bobolinks that lived there through the winter; how he refused to submit to the charms of any of them; but, when he had secured their affections, he informed them that he was not a marrying bird, but that they would always possess his esteem; and he would always remember the many happy hours he had passed in their society with feelings of pleasure that would, undoubtedly, be shaded and subdued by a sincere sorrow for the pain he had unwittingly caused them.

Drawing near, the Blackbirds perceived Bob perched on an alder, while his mate was hard

at work, carrying materials to her nest and shaping them into a commodious structure. Bob continued in a similar strain, and recited how he came to the north, and was followed by one of the young females, who could not be shaken off, but insisted upon being his devoted slave, and at last "he was obliged to marry in order to get rid of her."

Hearing these things, Mr. Blackbird began to feel a sort of dislike for his neighbor; for such vanity and self-conceit, not to say unkindness



Mr. Blackbird.

in his language, set him down as a worthless fellow, to say the least. Mrs. Blackbird did not perceive the foolishness of Bob's song; like other weak-minded persons, she could detect nothing but brilliancy and wit in any thing said by her favorite.

Blackbird, convinced that Bob was undeserving the trouble they had taken in coming to inform him of the Towhees' remark, endeavored to induce his mate to return home, but she would not listen to him; and, while they were in the midst of their discussion, Bob discovered their presence. He immediately joined them, and Blackbird, convinced that it was now useless to say any thing to his mate, held his peace, and let her tell her story. She began at once with —

“O my poor friend Bobolink, we have come, full of sympathy for you, to let you know how shamefully your character has been traduced — how wickedly you have been talked about by our neighbors, the Towhees.”

“The Towhees?” exclaimed Bob. “What, pray, can such birds as the Towhees have to say about *my* character, I should like to know? The Towhees, a pair of poor old humdrum scrubs, without one spark of sentiment or ambition! And what did they say?”

“Oh, dear, I can't remember half they said; but you may be sure that it was every thing

bad. They called you a miserable, noisy, rattle-brain ; said you were constantly away from your wife, chattering and rollicking ; in fact, that you do nothing from morning until night but gad about, singing to, or rather, worrying and disgusting, your neighbors.”

My readers will see how the Towhees’ language has undergone a change since its original issue. It is always the case that a story increases, in passing from one party to another, like a ball of snow that a schoolboy rolls across a field in different directions. It is always well to make an allowance of one-half, for the imagination of the person who relates a scandal at second-hand.

Bob had not enough sense to know this, and he at once believed that he was cruelly injured by the Towhees. You can never hurt a conceited fellow so keenly as through his vanity. Give him the worst of characters in the world ; say he will rob, murder, commit almost any crime,—and he will forgive you ; but tell the truth about him, and expose his weak points, and he is your enemy for all time.

If the Towhees had not said he was a noisy rattle-brain, and that his songs often worried and disgusted his neighbors, Bob would not have paid more than a passing attention to their words, even if they had said he neglected and abused his wife, stole grain, and, in fact, was guilty of all the misdeeds in the bird calendar.

He did not fly into a violent rage, but with a fixed purpose in his firmly-closed beak, a mischievous glitter in his sparkling black eyes, he simply remarked, —

“Ah! the Towhees are very kind; perhaps we will show them that they hardly understand our character. My dear friends, you must excuse me now, for my wife needs my assistance in the making of her nest; and, really, my nerves have been so much disturbed by this news, that I am unable to entertain you with the attention you deserve. Good-day, good-day.”

Dismissing his visitors thus summarily, he turned to the spot where his better, or weaker, half was busy, and vented his spleen on her by

finding fault with the nest, ridiculing its shape and the materials used in its construction.

Blackbird, on leaving him, saw that his wife and he had lost his friendship, and that he felt towards them somewhat as he did towards the Towhees ; for he knew that when vanity meets with a rebuff, even if it is struck over the shoulders of a third party, it feels dislike for the instrument almost as much as for the person that strikes the blow. Suggesting this to his wife, who, although a little touched at Bob's impoliteness, was not greatly offended at it, for she ascribed it to the unwelcome nature of the news she had carried him, he was silenced by a torrent of feminine argument and defence for her poor traduced friend, Bob.

Like a prudent husband he did not answer her, but waited until she had finished, when, although he did not exactly appear to agree with her, he simply said, —

“ At any rate, wife, we will not be the bearers of such news again to any bird ; for one is never thanked for them, as we have seen ourselves.”

Mrs. Blackbird did not answer him, and her silence more than implied that she saw that their tale-bearing had done no good, to say the least.

They soon returned to their nest, and, taking her place on the eggs, Mrs. Blackbird commenced her task of incubation, while Mr. Blackbird mounted on a low shrub, and began his simple song, hoping to banish from her mind the remembrance of the recent disagreeable events.



CHAPTER III.

ON the morning of the next day all the birds of the neighborhood were astir bright and early, busy at the various employments that are peculiar to their active bodies.

The Golden-crowned Thrushes, as soon as the rays of the sun had penetrated the foliage of the trees above and dried the dew from the hill-side, began excavating a slight hollow for

the reception of the first layer of materials used in the construction of their nest. Both birds labored diligently, and soon the hollow in the earth was deep enough. The nest was then begun, both birds bringing in their beaks large dead leaves and placing them in the excavation, in a sort of basket-form across each other in different directions; these were gradually carried up in the same manner, and were interwoven together, as much to secure firmness as protection from the rain and dew. On one side, facing the south-east, an aperture was left, just large enough for the easy passage of either bird into the structure, but on all the other sides it was closed.

The surrounding walls of the nest were hardly completed, and the artisans had not commenced the roof when they heard, down by the meadow, the loud tones of Bobolink, and a confused medley of other voices, apparently of the neighboring birds. Flying to the scene, the Golden Crowns discovered Bobolink perched on a tree on the edge of the meadow, surrounded by many of the neighbors, who

were listening to a speech he was making, and occasionally interrupting him either by applause or dissent, as his remarks agreed with or clashed against their opinions.

As the Thrushes approached the party, they inferred, from the concluding words of Bob, that he had been applauding his own merits, and had been comparing them with some of his acquaintances in the south; for he was saying, as they drew near, —

“ Yes, my friends, the Cardinal Birds and Nonpareils both acknowledged, that, although their attire was possessed of gayer colors than mine, still it did not exhibit the exquisite taste that is shown in mine. No, my friends, such beautifully blended colors, such complete harmony, are rarely found in the dress of any bird; and those southern aristocrats acknowledged it. But it is not of my dress that I wish to speak; that is as it is given me; but it is of my general characteristics that I wish to call your attention. Who can say a word against them? Who?” he repeated, looking about him disdainfully.

Probably, if the Towhees had been near, they might have answered him, for his manner was highly arrogant; but, like sensible birds, they were attending to their affairs, and were busy at work on their nest. The other birds that were listening did not answer him, for, although they knew he was a vain boaster and silly fellow, they did not wish to incur his enmity, for he could be very sarcastic and insulting; and, moreover, they were receiving considerable amusement from his conceited words.

Receiving no answer, Bob, after shaking his feathers and making himself look as sleek as possible, continued his harangue.

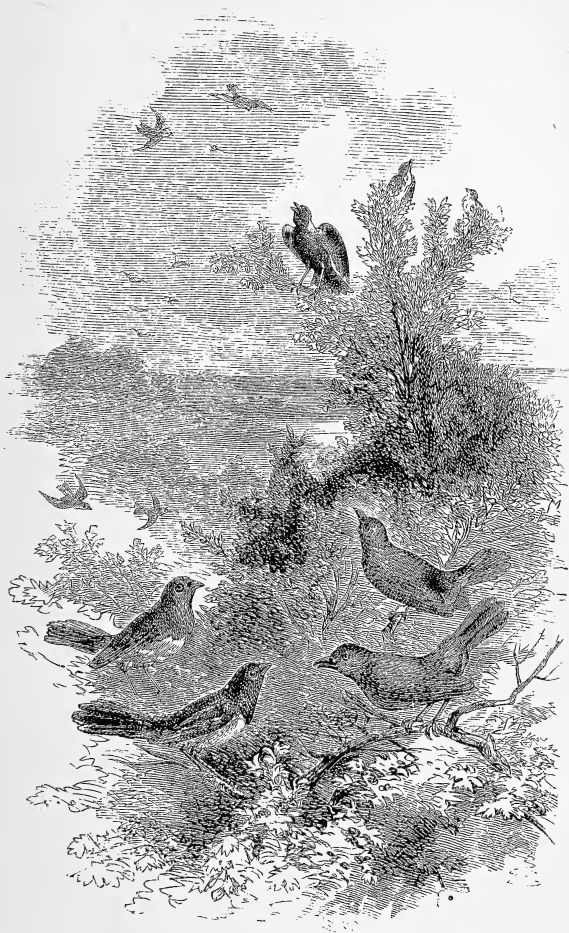
“No one, my friends, can say aught against me with truth, and no one does, save one pair of low-lived birds that I am about to describe to you.”

Here some of his listeners left abruptly, for they knew of the remarks the Towhees had made on the day before, and supposed that he referred to them; they were their personal friends, and were unwilling to hear them

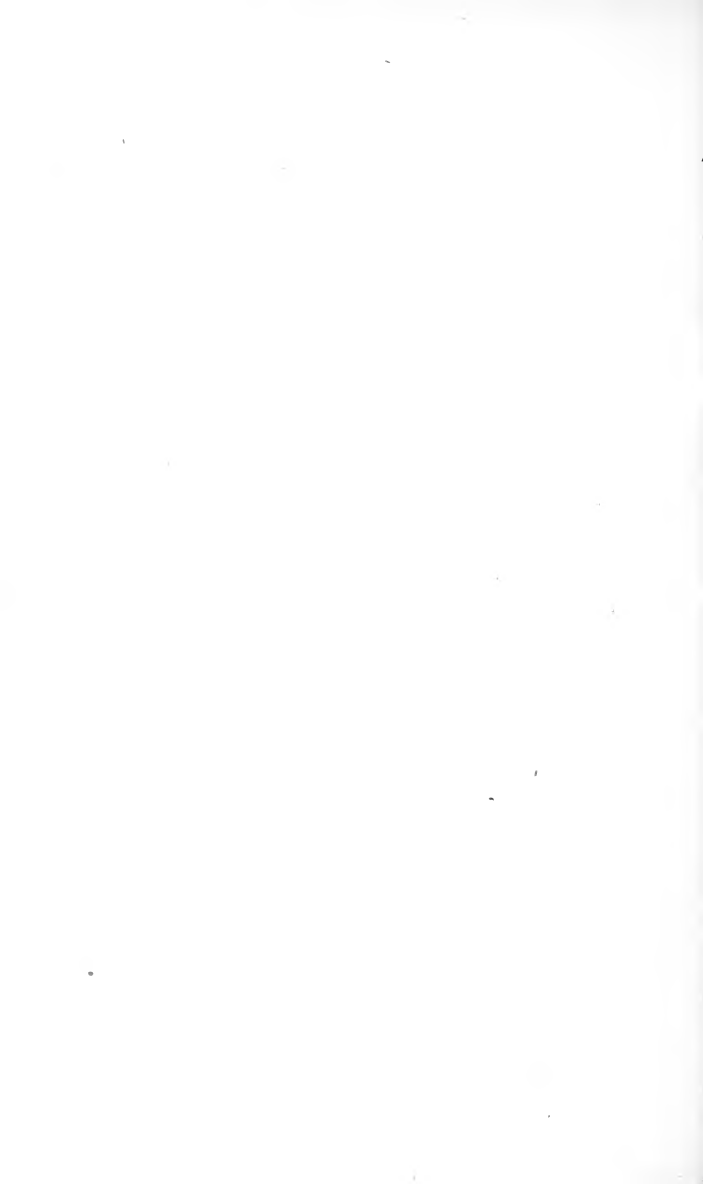
talked about. Some of the other birds, more out of curiosity to hear what Bob had to say than from any feeling they had for him, remained on their perches while he continued his speech.

“Many years ago,” said Bob, “Mother Nature, having made all the respectable species of birds, had a few stray materials, a little of this (brains), considerable of that (tail), and a good share of the other (mouth), left, and, after much deliberation, concluded to put these odds and ends together, and make a pair of things that would have an approach to a resemblance to birds. The creatures were made in a form familiar to us; and, that there may be no mistake, I will describe them exactly.”

Here he gave a minute description of the Towhees, bringing out all their peculiarities in the most ludicrous manner, and making them appear, altogether, most ridiculous. His listeners laughed at his description, for ridicule is almost always amusing, although they felt for the Towhees, and hoped they would



BOBOLINK'S ABUSE OF THE TOWHEES.



punish their enemy. Having finished his description, he continued his remarks as follows : —

“ Well, my friends, what these birds were created for, nobody could for a long time imagine. Most people supposed that they were intended for nothing but a burlesque on the whole race; but as the world grew more wicked, and real life was better understood, it was finally determined that these ‘ odds and ends,’ as they were called in many localities, were made as a sort of warning to all other birds, — a sort of animated mirror in which all the lowest and meanest qualities of the class were reflected. Now, this pair of ‘ odds and ends ’ were mean enough, in all conscience, from the beginning; but their detestable qualities have steadily increased in intensity, and the pair that has taken up its residence not a thousand miles from us represents the species in the most exaggerated form.”

Here Bob flew down to the brook to get a drink, or “ wet his whistle,” as he jocosely remarked, and while he was so doing, most of

his audience, getting tired of his nonsense, left the scene; among these were the Golden Crowns. A few remained to hear his story out, and to these he resumed his remarks.

“Now it is my misfortune,” he said, “to be envied, in my personal appearance, or good disposition, or sweet song, by this pair of ‘odds and ends,’ and they lose no opportunity of making me suffer from their meanness; they are confirmed scandal-mongers, and they are constantly pulling my character to pieces. Now, although, of course, they are beneath your notice, I will caution you all, my neighbors and friends, that none of you are safe from their wicked attacks; and that, if they are permitted to dwell among you, nothing but trouble and mischief will be the result.”

Here he paused, and looked about him for some sign of approval from his auditors; he was surprised, however, to find that but one or two of the birds were left; and as they listened apparently much amused, but made no sign of approval, he had sense to see that they were paying him the poor compliment of

listening for amusement's sake only, that his words made no impression upon them. Thinking, with his usual vanity, that the greater number of birds that had flown away were the ones on whom his words had had an effect, and concluding that the few left were not worth any more time, he abruptly ended his harangue by saying, —

“But I will not detain you any longer, for I know that your families need your loving care, and Mrs. Bobolink must be lonely without me. Be on your guard, then, and, if possible, let us banish these ‘odds and ends’ from our settlement.”

On concluding these words, he flew away to his wife in the meadow, and the other birds, sorry that they had wasted so much time with him, hurried away to their nests and families.

The Cat Birds, on passing the Towhees, stopped a moment to narrate what had been said against them, but they found that all had been already told them by the Golden Crowns. Mr. and Mrs. Towhee, although pained at the attack against them, manifested the best of

spirits ; they said they “ hoped Bob would see the error of his ways ; that the neighbors knew them too well to be influenced by any thing he could say.” And, when Cat Bird asked Towhee why he didn’t give Bob a trouncing, he answered, —

“ Not for the world ; we can submit to his persecutions, but we cannot demean ourselves to his level. Let him continue to abuse us, and I am much mistaken if his ill-treatment does not recoil on his own head.”

The Cat Birds took their leave, almost silent with their admiration of Towhee’s generosity and forbearance.



CHAPTER IV.

WE will not follow in detail the daily life of these birds, although they are full of interest and instruction. The Towhees constructed a neat nest of leaves and pine twigs, which they

placed at the foot of a small cedar-bush ; this they lined with soft leaves and grasses, and, when it was finished, Mrs. Towhee laid five pretty eggs, each of a pale bluish-white color, and covered with fine dots of brown and red.

The Golden-crowned Thrushes completed their nest, building up the sides and roofing them over in a form like an old fashioned oven ; the likeness was so great, that persons who happened to see the fabric, noticing its shape, called the Thrushes who built it "Oven Birds," and in many localities their descendants go by the same name to this day. Mrs. Golden Crown laid four beautiful white eggs, so thin that their contents almost showed through them, and tinged them with a beautiful roseate hue. All these eggs were prettily spotted with dots of reddish brown, which were scattered over their entire surface.

All the neighboring birds had, by this time, laid their eggs, and were busily employed in incubating, or in feeding their young that had already hatched.

Bobolink every morning mounted his favor-

ite tree, and gave vent to his ill-feelings for the Towhees, in a strain of abuse that would have, in ordinary-tempered birds, roused a feeling of anger that nothing but blows could appease. But the Towhees kept on in the even tenor of their way, and many of their neighbors were provoked at their indifference to Bob's abuses; indeed, some even accused Mr. Towhee with cowardice; they could not understand the perfect control he had over his feelings, nor appreciate the sublime faith he had in the future triumph of the right.

Bob thus succeeded in causing some few of the neighbors to treat the Towhees with coldness; for how could it be expected that all should stand such a continued torrent of ridicule and abuse as he poured forth?

One day Mr. Towhee came the nearest to being enraged that he did through the season; it was just after his mate had laid her eggs, and was sitting on them; the other birds were leaving her, after having congratulated her on her success, and Towhee was accompanying them a short distance, when the hated

voice of Bob was heard from his favorite tree.

“Hoh!” he exclaimed sarcastically, “so poor old Mrs. ‘Odds and Ends’ has laid some eggs! Hum! I wish her much luck. I supposed she had got by all usefulness in that line. I don’t believe but some of her neighbors took pity on her, and laid the eggs for her. Poor old soul! that silly habit she has of wagging her tail every time a body comes near her, or when she goes near the water so that she can see her own reflection, is very absurd! Just as if any body would fall in love with her! And old Mr. ‘Odds and Ends,’ he had better keep that widow Cow Bunting away from the neighborhood; he never appeared to have ordinary gumption.”

Now, to be accused of an acquaintance with the widow Cow Bunting, is to receive the greatest insult known to birds, and Towhee felt it keenly; but by a mighty effort he conquered his rage, and, although his friends urged him to give Bob a good drubbing, he only answered,—

“No, let him alone, and I will some time make him sorry for his ill treatment of us.”

So the Towhees, and Thrushes, and Blackbirds, and Warblers, and Cat Birds, and Bobolinks, all hatched their young ones; and, with the exception of the abuse from Bob, every thing in the neighborhood went on smoothly and satisfactorily.

The nest of Bobolink was placed on the ground in a low part of the meadow, and that of the Blackbirds in a low bush in a higher locality. Bob's wife hatched out four young ones, and was very successful in rearing them; she had the best wishes of the neighbors, notwithstanding her husband was no favorite, and got along well with them, bringing up her children to the stage of pin feathers and wing-quills without any difficulty.

At length, however, when the young Bobolinks were about half grown, a fearful accident happened, which, although giving the Towhees an opportunity to show that their magnanimity and charity were not the result of cowardice, but were genuine and heartfelt, terminated

unhappily the lives of two of the Bobolink family, and finally ended that of Bob himself.

It was towards morning of a night in the latter part of June, that a mink, in passing through the meadow in search of food for himself and young, came across the nest of Bob. Now, my readers are doubtless aware that of all the favorite tit-bits of food for these animals, none are so acceptable as the eggs and young of small birds. On discovering the nest, the mink, without giving any warning, thrust his nose at once among the family, and, seizing Mrs. Bobolink with one sharp bite, stretched her dead on the grass; then turning to the young ones, who were fluttering out of the nest, he succeeded in catching and killing one, when Bob, awakened by the noise and cries of his family, flew fiercely at the invader, and attacked him with furious bites and blows; for Bob, although vain and quarrelsome, was no coward, and the sight of his desolated home aroused all the fury of his anger.

Mr. Mink, despising his pigmy assailant, waited a favorable opportunity, and seizing

Bob by the wing the moment he made a lunge at him, tried to get him completely in his power ; but Bob with a mighty effort tore himself from the grasp of his enemy, and, although his wing was badly shattered at the shoulder, succeeded in escaping and joining his three children that he heard crying in the grass a few yards off.

The mink did not follow them, but contented himself with making a meal of Mrs. Bob and her chick ; and, as it was now near daybreak, he retreated to his home in the ledge, for Mr. Mink rarely permits himself to be seen in the daytime, but prefers the quiet of the night for his piratical wanderings.



CHAPTER V.

As soon as the neighboring birds heard of the disaster to Bob's family, all was confusion and dismay, for they felt that they were likely to

fall, at any time, victims to the voracity of the common enemy. Search was quickly made to discover if any of the family were spared. None were more earnest in the search than the Towhees, and they were the first to discover Bob and his young ones.

Calling all the other birds to the scene, they learned from Bob all the particulars of the disaster. Poor Bob was faint from the loss of blood, and his chicks half famished for want of food; and, as the least movement of his caused the most intense pain, there seemed a good prospect of the whole family's starving, when Towhee, as soon as the narration of the murder was finished, at once exclaimed, —

“Well, friends, it will never do for us to permit our neighbor here and his children to starve; and we cannot, in a better way, show our sympathy for Bobolink's affliction than by feeding and caring for him and his family until they are able to provide for themselves. Let us, then, at once provide them with proper food; and, if our own lives are spared, we will have our neighbor Bob as well as ever in a fortnight.”

This speech from Towhee created the greatest sensation among the listeners, for they all knew how much he had suffered from the ill-will of the other. None were more excited than Bob himself, for he knew how little he deserved this generous treatment from his neighbor.

Towhee, seeing that Bob was much excited, interrupted the murmurs of applause that the other birds were beginning to utter, by quietly leading them away in search of food; and it was not long before they returned in scattered parties of two or three, with delicate insects and caterpillars, berries and spiders, for the sustenance of Bob and his family.

For several days this care was continued. The extra labor that the birds took upon themselves was so little that they hardly felt it; the Towhees were most active in this work of charity, and their admirable conduct was the theme of constant commendation among the neighbors. Those who did not understand their forbearance when they were smarting most under the abuse of Bob, now compre-

hended all, and they felt that Bob must have a hard heart, indeed, if he could withstand this treatment.

At length Bob, who had visibly begun to fail, his wing having become badly inflamed, and the inflammation having extended up over the shoulder and breast, refused to take food, and he soon grew so feeble that the birds felt that his end must be very near.

It was towards the close of a beautiful day that the Towhees, with some food for the Bobolink family, flew down to the clump of bushes in which the afflicted ones were staying; they had hardly alighted when they perceived that Bob was very weak, and they were on the point of flying off to inform the neighbors, when Bob stopped them.

“Stay,” he said; “I wish to say a few words to you alone, for I feel that I may never have another opportunity. As my end draws near, I cannot longer refrain from acknowledging my appreciation of your great kindness and charity. My pride, my curse, would not permit me to speak to you thus before this, but I

have not lost one spark of your generosity, and none of your kind acts have been unnoticed."

"There, there," interrupted Towhee, "you must not talk in this strain; keep as quiet as possible; do not get excited, and we hope to see you well before the blueberries are gone."

"Do not deceive yourself or me," answered Bob. "I know well that my time has come. Towhee, during all my abuse of you not one word of resentment passed your tongue. You must have suffered, for one must be more than mortal not to suffer under such ill-treatment. I feel that I should leave these scenes with an easier mind if I knew that you forgive me. Can you forget all the pain that I have caused you? Can you, when I humbly acknowledge my fault, forgive me?"

The Towhees, who were visibly affected, at first made no answer; but Mr. Towhee, quickly recovering himself, assured Bob that they had not cherished any ill-feeling for him; that they felt they were weak and imperfect themselves, and that they were as needy of charity as

their neighbors ; they had no doubt but that he felt keenly insulted by the exaggerated account that Mrs. Blackbird had given him of his own remarks, and which they had but that day become acquainted with. They acknowledged they should not have spoken of him as they did, and he was not so much to blame for resenting it.

“ Stop ! ” interrupted Bob : “ your precepts and practice do not agree, for you have shown that you will not resent an injury. But I feel myself growing weak. Towhee, I must now leave these poor orphans of mine ; will you and your mate, like good friends as you are, continue the kind treatment that you have lately given them ? Will you educate them in all the good precepts that you can teach so well, and endeavor to make them as good members of society as yourselves ? Will you do this for the children of your late enemy ? ”

“ We will,” answered the Towhees. “ We should feel, indeed, that we were undeserving of the friendship of our neighbors if we should abandon these poor chicks. And, as

for your enmity, not another word about that; it is past and gone, and is now forgotten."

"You are too good," feebly replied Bobolink.

"Take good care of my children, and forgive my ill-treatment. Good-by, good-by." And poor Bob breathed his last.

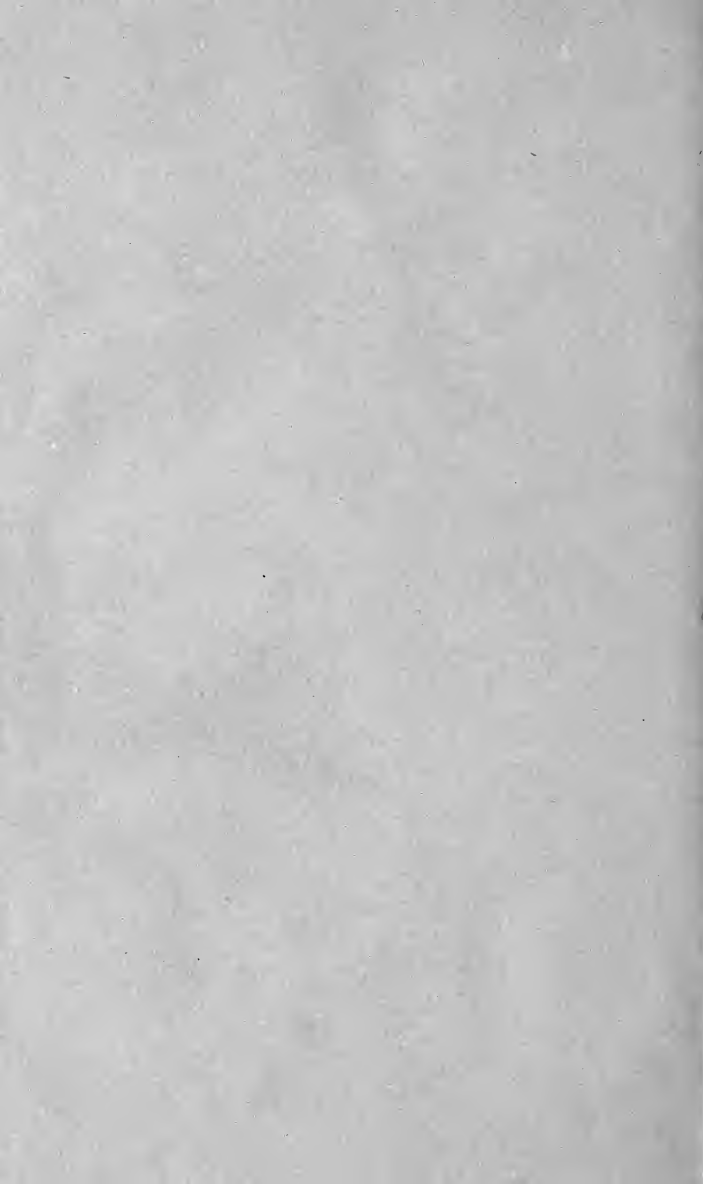
The Towhees, as soon as they were certain of his death, quickly called some of the nearest neighbors, when with pious care they, with sweet-scented ferns and leaves of the bayberry, covered him from mortal gaze.

The sun was just sinking below the western hills when this duty was accomplished, and the Towhees had but time to provide a new shelter for their protégés before it was evening. Guiding them to a little thicket of juniper-bushes close to their own nest, they made them as comfortable as possible, when Towhee, taking his position in a shrub near by, lulled them to sleep with the same sweet evening song that he had heretofore sung to his own little ones and good wife in the nest beside them.

We will not follow the labors of the worthy

birds any farther, for it is unnecessary. We know that they faithfully kept their promise, and reared and educated the young Bobolinks as if they were their own. They taught them about the phenomena of the seasons; showed them the best and most approved methods of flight, and gave them all the information they possessed in relation to the theory of the different kinds of food, and taught them something about the restrictions that men put upon the birds in the fields and gardens. They succeeded in making them, altogether, the best behaved of all the Bobolinks, and we were persuaded when we met one last summer, and saw how he was plagued by a pugnacious King Bird, and driven repeatedly from his mate without retaliating, in any way than by a cheerful song, that, with their other lessons, the Towhees had not neglected to impress upon their minds the great truth that had governed their own lives, that it is better to "resist not evil," but to "do good to them that hate you, and despitefully use you and persecute you."





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